



A STRONG MAN NEEDED



MAURICE
RICHARDSON





Perditus Liber Presents
the



OCLC: 1038388811

book:

A Strong Man Needed

by

Maurice Richardson

Published 1932

A STRONG MAN NEEDED

**A STRONG MAN
NEEDED**



**MAURICE
RICHARDSON**



**NEW YORK
HORACE LIVERIGHT • INC.**

COPYRIGHT, 1932, BY HORACE LIVERIGHT, INC.

MANUFACTURED IN THE U. S. A.

WITH LOVE

TO

G. B.

All the characters in this book are entirely
imaginary.

Contents

Chapter One
Chapter Two
Chapter Three
Chapter Four
Chapter Five
Chapter Six
Chapter Seven
Chapter Eight
Chapter Nine
Chapter Ten
Chapter Eleven
Chapter Twelve
Chapter Thirteen
Chapter Fourteen
Chapter Fifteen
Chapter Sixteen

CHAPTER I

FEW, it is said, of those scarce and select families with more than fifty years of history were half so impoverished as the clan of Cadwallow. Certainly none struggled harder to keep up its position and stay out of debt. We will omit even the shortest review of its nineteen hundred and thirty years' chronicle and skip, without a moment's lingering, to the second quarter of the twentieth century. At this time the main line of the stock consisted of old Lady Cadwallow, very old Lord Cadwallow, and their two sons and three daughters, with headquarters in five or, according to the time of year, six rooms of a vast house overlooking the Regent's Park Canal. As a tribute to antiquity, a kindly government had ordered its rate and tax-collectors to ignore their existence. While many a heckler had confounded the Communist tub-thumpers by bawling, "What about the Cadwallows, you can't call them bloated!"; and it was even told of old Lady Cadwallow herself that she had brought tears to the eyes of a Welsh miners' meeting in Trafalgar Square with a screech of—"What! *Me* grind the faces of the poor; why, they never stop putting their boots in my mouth!"

As for the two sons and three daughters, they were given, at the cost of what sacrifice has never been ascertained, the education and upbringing of their class. Whenever the time came for one of

7

them to be sent to school it was summoned to its father's bedroom and, craning from the wrappings of a Paisley shawl his long neck, retractile like that of a tortoise, the old gentleman, in a harsh crackling voice, would deliver himself of the following address:—

"Your poor dear mother has suggested a Secondary School education, but as I have noticed no signs that you would profit by such an advantage I am sending you to-morrow to Eton—or Roedean, which ever you are fitted for by your sex: I cannot see what that may be, for I am blinder than a mole and have forgotten which one of you I sent for. There is no need for me to tell you not to borrow money—nobody would be such a fool as to lend you any. Have no fear of talking to strange men in railway carriages; if you are any child of mine you are probably far too ugly to be in danger of assault. Always remember that you represent the oldest family in Europe; if that is

not enough to be proud of you can remember that it is also the poorest. You have already learnt to expect no assistance from me, well, you can expect even less from your relatives—with the sole exception of myself they are members of the Church—good morning, good afternoon, or goodnight—I cannot see which it is and my watch stopped the day you were born.”

Lord Cadwallow’s statement about his relatives was no exaggeration. From the Reformation onwards, the family, with one or two notable exceptions, had taken to the Church like ducks to water, and sun-darkened colonial bishops had more than

8

once been known to interrupt the proceedings of an ecclesiastical congress by their dry whispers about “our cousin, the head of the family.”

After Oxford, where they were sparingly entertained by the Egyptian and South American snob colonies, the two sons, the Hon. Malahide Cornet, and the Hon. Sebastian Comet, were paraded before their father and mother.

“You had better do the talking, my dear,” said Lord Cadwallow. “I can never remember their names.”

“We have arranged for your careers as follows,” said Lady Cadwallow. “You, Malahide, are leaving us for Australia to-morrow. Your uncle, the bishop of Warracatta, has offered you the post of diocesan secretary, and is paying your fare, steerage, in order, he says, that you may get a knowledge of life. As I believe you are not allowed to land in England without twelve pounds in your pocket I doubt if we shall ever see you again. Sebastian, you will start your duties as clerk to Mr. Kenneth, the pawnbroker round the corner. Being, I am glad to say, something of a snob he has consented in your case to waive the premium and—stop plucking holes in that waste-paper basket, Hilary, there are enough already” (this to her husband)—“has even gone so far as to suggest paying you a small salary later on. When you have packed your clothes, Malahide, will you please push the bed out on the landing and Sebastian will take it to Mr. Kenneth to-morrow. I would send you to Australia too, Sebastian, but you are so small you would only get trodden on. Malahide, I would keep

9

you at home if I could, but you are too large—and you eat too much bread.”

“*Far* too much,” croaked Lord Cadwallow.

On the morning before her three daughters were presented, Lady Cadwallow made yet another speech from the depths of a low armchair—unusually low, for its legs were gone.

“In these days,” she trumpeted, “since there is no longer any aristocracy save that of wealth, it is clearly impossible for you to marry beneath your station. Indeed I shall be exceedingly surprised if you marry at all, but, nevertheless, I expect you to try. You must decide for yourselves whether, you will have two hats and one evening dress, or two evening dresses and one hat, as I cannot possibly afford two of each. Should any of you wish to exceed this allowance, she will have to go without her summer underclothes. Your frocks for this evening have been kindly loaned by Mr. Clarkson. They were last used in ‘The Belle of New York,’ but that is no reason why you should not treat them carefully—and please see that the name of his firm does not appear in the *Morning Post*.”

The two elder daughters, Phœbe and Atalanta, being lovely and slim-necked, duly married young men in the motor industry. “My girls,” said Lady Cadwallow to the pressmen on the steps of the registry office, “have contracted an alliance with the Garage. I can only thank God that it was not the Sewage department”—and for the next two years Titania, the youngest, less beautiful but less stupid, was regarded by her parents with a thinly veiled disgust. But when the motor

10

salesmen’s wives began to produce children in their two-roomed flats, and were warned by the Sanitary Inspector, so that they removed their families to Cadwallow House and the hall became filled with perambulators, Titania’s stock went up with a bound, and her father was heard telling himself—for he seldom spoke to any one else—“That what’s-her-name, she’s the brains of the family!”

• • • • •

The pale sun of a December noon blinked feebly through the tall dirty windows of Cadwallow House, trapping in its beams the particles of age-old dust that swirled through the disused rooms. In the library it caught the head of Lord Cadwallow, as he sat on the floor writing his “History of Church Furniture” (on the backs of old visiting cards), capping it for a moment with a lop-sided halo. Upstairs it made easier the task of Lightfoot, the butler-housemaid, as he stitched a rent in Titania’s skirt. A highly skilled needleman was Lightfoot—he used to remark to Wycliffe, the cat,

with whom, at night, he shared the cellar, that it was a good thing the silver was always round the corner, for what with mending her ladyship's stockings and making Miss Titania's "tuppennys" and rocking the grandchildren to sleep, to say nothing of emptying the slops, there'd be no time to clean it.

But there were red-letter nights for Lightfoot, such as the occasions when Titania was asked to "bring her own partner." Reputed to have been born on the same day as Cadwallow himself, the old servant, with his yard-long snow-white beard, could be got up to represent an astonishingly

11

dignified figure. The lackeys would throw open the doors intoning—"The honourable Titania Cornet" and the 'Metropolitan of Epanchin,' or the 'Rabbi Mahanaim,' or simply 'His Eminence,' whichever Lightfoot had decided to masquerade as that evening; and the strange couple never failed to command attention as they strode into the throng, with the old servant whispering, "Hold up your pettie, Miss Titania, do, there's a dear!"

• • • • •

On this stained-glass window of a morning it was necessary to adorn his young mistress with particularly loving care, for she and her brother Sebastian were to have lunch with their friend the Macgillivray of Ballas, the richest Scotsman in London, at whom Titania had instructions to set her cap.

The last safety pin attached by fond if trembling fingers, red ink applied to the stains in her hat, and a kiss bestowed on the nodding skull of her lady's-man, Titania swung her sturdy shoulders down the chipped and mouldering marble staircase, to be met by a white head which popped at her out of the door leading to the basement. Lady Cadwallow, ever busied with ingenious economies, was making a Christmas pudding from black bread and golden syrup—"Don't think you can fool me by putting in pieces of coal instead of currants," her husband had told her, "I may have no teeth but I still have taste, thank God.")

"Don't forget to ask Macgillivray if he can let me have a few salted almonds, and don't let Sebastian be late back at his shop," she cried, on seeing her daughter.

12

"No, Mummy!"

“And if his aunt is there, ask her if she’d like to adopt one of these—” with a shudder and a wave of the hand towards the ranks of the perambulators—“she’s been wanting a child ever since her dog died.”

“Yes, Mummy!”

And whistling up at the skeletal trees, Titania turned the corner towards the pawnbroker’s. The little financier, wearing a skull cap, the badge of his profession, was sunning himself at the door of his shop, absorbed in burnishing with a green silk handkerchief a small sparkling object which he held between his forefinger and thumb. This was his glass eye and it seemed to notice Titania for it leapt glittering back to its socket in an instant.

“Good morning, Mr. Kenneth!” said Titania.

“Good morning, my lady, or is it miss? I beg your pardon, and what have you got for me to-day?” said the pawnbroker as he advanced one foot and bowed low.

“No business, Mr. Kenneth. I’ve come to take my brother out to lunch.”

“Ah, the Honourable Sebastian, of course, yes, yes, of course,” and he squeaked back into the shop, “Tell the Honourable Sebastian Cornet that his sister’s waiting.... You remember that clock-work model of Cardinal Manning, miss, that her ladyship brought here—of course you do—well, I warn you, miss, the year and a week will be up in a fortnight and I shall have to sell it, you know, and I’ve had plenty of inquiries about it, it’s a great

13

attraction for business, that is, miss, when I set it going in the window—your mother will be heart-broken, she will, and I’ll be sorry to lose His Eminence myself. Is there any chance, do your think, miss?”

“I don’t know at all, Mr. Kenneth—if it wasn’t for those nephews and nieces of mine—my two sisters’ children—we might be able to redeem it, but it is simply terrible what they cost to feed. My mother put four of them in a pram the other day and chained it to the railings of the Foundling Hospital, but, of course, it was brought back that afternoon and we had to answer a lot of awkward questions—she’d forgotten to take off the label with our address on it.”

“I commiserate with you, miss, I do indeed!” said Mr. Kenneth, “those little hungry mouths, confound them, those little—but here’s the Honourable Sebastian at last. Now mind you enjoy yourselves, and Mr.

Sebastian, sir, as it's Friday, and that's a slack day to be sure, you can take the afternoon off, you can sir. Good morning to you both, and don't forget the Cardinal, miss, will you?" And little Mr. Kenneth, with a twitter of, "I shall keep my eye on you to see you don't get run over," flipped out his crystal orb and held it above his head as if to superintend their safe passage round the corner.

• • • • •

"I am afraid, darling," said Titania, as they arranged themselves on the top of a southward-bound omnibus, "I am very much afraid that we are really in debt at last."

14

Sebastian, who was something under five feet high, with an impertinent brown face framed in curls of the richest auburn, lit his large meerschaum pipe, so large that he had to hold it with both hands, and grunted in meditation.

"Do you really mean to tell me, Titania, that our family has never been in debt before?"

"I do, indeed. For one thousand nine hundred and however many years it is, our proud boast has been that, though we may seldom have possessed a penny, we have never owed one. Lightfoot told me this morning, when he was getting me ready, that he heard old 'Slob' (this was his children's name for Lord Cadwallow) having a sane moment just before he was put to bed last night—he was talking to the chest of drawers—'Duke Godfrey,' he said—you know that's what he calls it now—'Duke Godfrey, I'm not only ruined, I'm sunk. I cannot afford to keep my grandchildren and nor can their parents. We are a prolific family and there will undoubtedly be many more. If the slave trade was still flourishing it would be a different matter. As it is we are faced with starvation, and the County Court, which I detest, because they will never let me sleep in peace!'—Of course what will happen when he hears that Atalanta's going to have another I daren't think."

"Is she, indeed—I thought it wasn't quite certain."

"Oh, well it is now, quite inevitably certain. In fact, she is so positive herself that I begin to be afraid of more than one." They held their tongues in gloomy silence.

15

“You know, Titania,” said Sebastian, as a block in Regent Street checked their advance, “it’s all very well for mummy to talk about her pride and the number of people who offer to lend her money. It’s the greatest nonsense really. Not only do people refuse to give her her sixpence to pay the bus home, but I believe they *like* to see us poor. If we had any money they’d say it was a sure sign the country had gone to the dogs. Of course we might ask the *London Mercury* to raise a fund for us as if we were a city church.”

“I think I shall try and borrow some from Macgillivray,” said Titania; and then they got off the bus.

• • • • •

The Macgillivray of Ballas put himself in front of the public eye with such a clockwork regularity that the News editors of Fleet Street had taken to naming their children after him, and a false rumour of his death had sent every gossip column writer in Europe into the deepest mourning. Social historians of the last century would have labelled him a dilettante, but he was endowed with a hardy and perilous vigour more fitted to a social reformer or Squire Western. During the period from birth to the time when this story discovers him at the age of thirty-five there was, as his cousin the Home Secretary put it, “Nothing you could think of that the damn fellow hadn’t been up to.” Vast wealth had helped him to indulge even the most ludicrous freaks of his imagination. Parties in the aquarium at the Zoo, buying the entire contents of the Royal Academy for 1926 and destroying them in a bon-

16

fire on Wimbledon Common, the attempted kidnapping of the Begum of Johmah!—with such vain gestures as these was his name associated.

And his appearance and behaviour were eccentric, in keeping with his reputation. Of middle height and slim build, his body was commanded by a high, narrow skull, sown over with a rich crop of bright orange hair, tossing with the jerks of his head like the waves of the sea. His features, when their conformation was not lost in a whirl of contorting grimaces, one observed to be curved and vulturine; while the whole person, owing to his excessive vitality, was perpetually twitching and jiggling until it made one dizzy to look at him. With his hands he would ever be plucking at the table-cloth or the curtain ropes, or whatever was nearest to him, and at meal times, to quiet his nimble fingers and spare the glass and china, a servant would engage his attention with a piece of string. When in London he occupied

two houses of Carlton House Terrace knocked into one, and it was his custom, of an afternoon, to make faces from an upper window and let off fireworks in the direction of the Athenæum across the way, in order, as he explained when inquiries were made by the Club secretary, “to give the old devils something to think about.”

The Macgillivray received Titania and Sebastian in a long narrow dining-room decorated as if it were the bedroom of a Second Empire *cocotte*. When dealing with personal friends he could converse in a thoroughly direct and normal fashion, but towards strangers or simpletons he adopted a manner so

17

precious and swooning, so elaborate and languorous, so hectoring and assertive by turns, as to make them think they were being addressed by a steam organ.

“And how is the Order of Mendicants this morning?” said this strange personage, as he came to a comparative standstill against the mantelpiece.

“You want me to lend you some money, I suppose; well I won’t, so there! I never lend money except in the interests of business.”

“We’d rather have the cost of our lunch and take a few things home in a paper bag without having to listen to your monkey’s-chatter for the rest of the afternoon,” said Sebastian.

“Oh you cads, you thieves, you brood of leeches, I shall have you searched before you leave the house;” the Macgillivray was embarked upon the spate of invective which he reserved for his most affectionate moments, “come and have lunch—be introduced,” he laid a hand on each of their shoulders, “extraordinary couple—eccentric people ... poor as rats ... no rats in their house, nothing for them ... awful family ... frightful family ... dotty father, dotty mother ... quite honest, though, quite honest.”

They sat down to lunch. As usual the Macgillivray’s guests were various and badly assorted. Lord Chargehead, an elderly peer of the backwoods variety, arrayed in a kind of semi-ratcatching fancy dress, was on Titania’s right. Sandwiched between him and his friend Lord Bolus, who had the profile of a buzzard and a vocabulary which seemed to be limited to “prrhmm, prrhmm, prrhmm,

18

prrhmm, prrhmmm,” a nervous coloured gentleman was trying to lure Ballas into a discussion of the Renaissance. “Be quiet, wog, can’t you, for God’s sake ... hold your tongue, you infernal fuzzy wuzzy. No! I don’t think coloured people are anything like so good as white,” was his host’s reply. Further down the table amazed faces of frightened, serious women kept turning towards the door in expectation of an Asylum Authority. Conversation impossible, brother and sister went on eating away regardless. As for the Macgillivray, he soon became so excited that he could scarcely speak.

“I think,” said Sebastian, “that, in a minute or two, he’ll start turning people out. Do you remember, Titania, that party last year, how, after emptying the room, he caught sight of his reflection in a mirror and mistook himself for somebody else and ordered the servants to take him away? Now listen.”

The Macgillivray was leaning over the table, his features working nineteen to the dozen, in the direction of Lord Bolus, who was engaged in a friendly lamentation with Chargehead about the increasing use of that questionable weapon, the punt gun.

“What I say is,” he was saying, “what I say is that it’s all right to let it off at hornets and that sort of thing, you know; that’s vermin, that is, and they aren’t sport, but when it comes to duck, well, a gentleman’s a gentleman, I mean.”

“I don’t agree at all,” screamed Ballas; “a gun’s a gun, and a punt’s a punt, and a duck’s a duck, and you’re a couple of old quackers.”

“I say, steady, Mac, steady,” (one of the many

19

certain ways of rousing Ballas to frenzy was calling him Mac.)

“Out you go, both of you, I’m not going to be contradicted at my own table. Don’t believe I ever asked you! Where’s your written invitation? Haven’t got one; thought not; asked yourselves, as usual, I suppose! Take them away, take them away!”

“It’s no use, Macgillivray, you’ll be certified before very long,” said Titania, as they drank coffee, “you look like a lunatic, you behave like one ...”

“And you are one!” shouted Sebastian, “and it’s no good trying to turn us out because we know that game, and we just won’t play it.”

But at this point they were interrupted by the arrival of Miss Edwina Dumbleton, commonly known, owing to her mother's profession before marriage, as "the Caretaker's Daughter." This young lady, who had presented her high-boned, equine countenance at the door of every entertainment in London, Paris and New York for more years than she cared to be reminded of, was no friend of Titania's, whom she regarded as a serious rival in the running for the Macgillivray. Her technique, in the furtherance of her suit, was to take, without a whisper of complaint, any witticism or insult he chose to let off at her, while she would wait for his weaker moments, and then pounce out upon him with flattery. When he directed the attack elsewhere she would follow in his train, and discharge her own clumsy darts over his shoulder. Sebastian, with the crudity of his extreme youth and all the abominable rudeness of his family, never tired of greeting her by whistling loudly, "Who takes care

20

of the Caretaker's Daughter?" From this it may be seen that her dislike of the Cornets was not without some foundation.

Miss Dumbleton, sniffing the air with her head thrown back in contempt, and on the defensive, came over to the Macgillivray. "Darling, terribly sorry to be so late, but I was practising."

"That abominable practice of piano-practising will get you into trouble one of these days, my girl—hammering away at 'Pop goes the Weasel' and telling the people it's Prokofieff."

"Shut up, Macgillivray, don't encourage her."

"You gag yourself, Sebastian; don't you know a bit of quality when you see one?"

"Quality be damned—at least I never fell asleep, full of gin, in the basement, and let the house be burgled." This referred to an incompetent piece of caretaking on the part of the late Mrs. Dumbleton.

"Poor things! I wonder you know how to eat off a plate. Thank God I'm rich," and had it not been for the butler this exchange of childish banter would have continued indefinitely.

"You're wanted on the telephone, miss," he said to Titania, "it's her ladyship, I think;" staccato cracklings and pings from the receiver confirmed his opinion.

"Yes, Mummy, this is Titania."

“Is it indeed, and how am I to know? but I suppose I shall have to take it on trust.” Lady Cadwallow had a nervous hatred of telephones and always suspected them of playing her tricks. “A most extraordinary piece of good fortune, Titania. The first number I tried was engaged, which saved

21

me twopence, and when I pressed button ‘B’ out came a perfect flood of pennies! Now, what was I going to tell you? Can you hear me? ... No? Well, never mind, I shall say it just the same. A telegram has come from Malahide saying that he is arriving at Tilbury this afternoon and will be home for dinner. That is bad enough, but what terrifies me is that he says ‘*both of us ...*’ Whatever does that mean? Do you know? Of course you don’t. Your father, with characteristic idiocy, suggests that the mysterious companion is a third son whose existence he had forgotten. As if I did not know the number of my own children! Come home for tea, my dear, and tell me what you think ... really, at this time of year, and Malahide’s appetite—of course it may be the bishop and then God help us—Malahide—Malahide—Malahide—this is intolerable! Mind you’re home for tea, Titania.” And an insistent clanging denoted that Lady Cadwallow was once again trying her luck with button “B.”

“Obviously he’s picked up something and married it,” said Sebastian, when he heard the news. “Macgillivray, won’t you even give us a loaf of bread to take home? It isn’t for ourselves so much as for poor Lightfoot—he and Wycliffe were nearly arrested the other day for robbing a mouse-trap. Titania, darling, you ask him!”

“If you’re really in such straits, children,” said the Macgillivray, “you can go and take what you like from Boulestin’s and tell them to send me the bill. Of course, I shall expect something in return. And don’t forget now—if you ever do have any business proposition to suggest, come to me.”

22

“I think you’re quite a success with Macgillivray, all the same, Titania. I shouldn’t worry about the caretaker’s daughter if I were you,” said Sebastian on their way down the Duke of York’s steps.

“If I wait a little longer he’ll be calling on me to help him get away from those Asylum Authorities—if it wasn’t for the Press Lords he’d have been certified long ago—but that Edwina is a spiteful brute, and she’ll stop at nothing to do us down—we must be careful of her, Sebastian.”

• • • • •

If there was any current of expectancy in the air that afternoon, the inmates of Cadwallow House preserved externally their usual monastic detachment. Tea, which came out of a large, butcher-blue, tin teapot, accompanied by thick slices of bread and dripping, was served in the library, the contents of whose shelves were occupying three outhouses at the back of Mr. Kenneth's shop. While Lady Cadwallow poured out, her husband threaded the pages of his *History of Church Furniture* on a long piece of string, and, from time to time, would turn his head to disagree sharply with Wycliffe, the cat, whom he wrongfully imagined to have made a remark. That pair of silly beauties, Phœbe and Atalanta, were sewing away at their babies' clothes when Sebastian and Titania came in, breathless from running up the tall staircase, and drank their tea giggling. They had just been planning a new and hitherto unique impersonation for Lightfoot. Lady Cadwallow banged down the teapot and bit a half moon from her bread and dripping.

"Well anyway," she said, "thank God it isn't

23

Charity Night." Charity Night, which happened once a month, consisted in providing dinner for the husbands of Phœbe and Atalanta; since the arrival of their offspring these were the only occasions on which they were allowed inside the house.

"Oh, Mummy, I forgot to tell you," said Titania, "I was so busy thinking about Malahide, but I've solved the problem of dinner to-night. I persuaded Macgillivray to let me have tick at Boulestin's. Quantities, my dear! It's downstairs with Lightfoot." Her father dropped his string of visiting cards with a cry, and for the first time that week remembered his daughter's name.

"Titania," he said, "you may be destined to lead apes in hell, which I understand is the fate of all unmarried women, but you're a very thoughtful girl"—and—"Precious, how clever!" cooed Phœbe and Atalanta, arching their slim white necks.

Just then there was a loud knock, and Lightfoot stumbled into the room, his eyes bulging from his head. "God save us!" he cried, and then, pulling himself together sufficiently to hold open the door, "Mister Malahide and—er—erhrm—I beg your pardon, I don't mean any offence, but——"

CHAPTER II

“TH-TH-IS,” said Malahide, nervous and gawky as ever, “is M-miss W-w-ilhelmina Harkaway.”

The reason for Lightfoot’s astonishment was obvious. Malahide’s mysterious companion was revealed, when she unbent herself after passing through

24

the doorway, as a giantess, at least nine feet high. She wore a red velvet dress, which looked as if it had been made from a theatrical drop curtain, and her feet were bound round in skins. It was some time before the family were able to comprehend anything more than her size. Slowly they realised that not only in her general outlines, but down to the smallest visible detail of anatomical construction, was she a human being like themselves, and with nothing about her to suggest the village idiot or circus freak. Her face was thoughtful in expression, with a concave nose and slightly protruding lower lip, not jutting out dottily like the Habsburg brand, yet enough to give indication of an agreeably childish pout. A lock of her fair hair, which was but roughly clipped, hung down over one eye. Her skin was tanned to a fashionable biscuit colour and her hands were gracefully shaped.

In three stately, yet easy, strides she crossed over to Lady Cadwallow and, with an enchanting, almost laughing, red and white smile, held out her hand. “How do you do,” she said in a deep soft voice; “I think, perhaps, I’d better sit on the floor. There’s no need for you to be ashamed of me, Malahide, it isn’t as if I was your wife.”

Lady Cadwallow stood up, and even her husband began to pay a little attention to his surroundings.

“Malahide,” she exclaimed, “will you kindly explain the meaning of this. I thought I told you to stay in Australia until further notice.”

“Go on, Malahide,” said the giantess, “and don’t stammer. I thought you told me you weren’t afraid of your family!”

25

“Well, you see, Mummy, it’s a very long story, and——”

“Then see if you can’t make it shorter!” said Lord Cadwallow, which was so disconcerting that Malahide broke into a protracted stutter which

threatened to crack his teeth. Miss Harkaway gently covered his head with her hand.

“All right, all right, I’ll tell them,” she murmured.

“Yes please, Bill,” said Malahide.

“From what he had told me,” the giantess began—and Lord Cadwallow nodded his head in approval, for here at least was a voice which could pierce the wall of his deafness without breaking his eardrums—“I gather that, from the day he landed Malahide found his uncle an impossible character to get on with. He was expected, as diocesan secretary, not only to perform all the duties of cook, sacristan, verger, cup-bearer, grave-digger and charwoman combined, but also to do the rooms of the candidates for ordination, who, owing to their permanent inability to get sober, stayed on, uninvited guests, at the bishop’s palace.”

“I to-to-to-told him straight,” interrupted Malahide, “I s-said, ‘Uncle, you—you d-dirty old b-b-badger, I-I-I refuse. Any other c-c-candidates but these perhaps.... I may be poor and I d-don’t mind doing housework, but I’m not a swineherd’ and then uncle said, ‘For this impertinence you s-shall walk round the diocese distributing tracts;’ the diocese I may tell you was f-forty thousand square miles.”

“Whereupon,” continued the giantess, “Malahide cashed one of the episcopal cheques, saddled the diocesan mule, and rode off. Now we come to

26

my history which I won’t weary you with in any detail. I am nineteen. My father was a retired army captain, and he came to Australia hoping to make his fortune by establishing a chain of public lavatories across the Continent from North to South—‘Comfort Stations’ he used to call them—he was rather eccentric, as you may imagine. But, by accident, he dropped his letter of credit down one of the already existing native variety, and we were starving in no time. Malahide saw me, on his way to the Coast, and, astonished at my extraordinary size, fell off his mule. I picked him up and we got into conversation. He very kindly offered to take us back to England, paying our passage out of the proceeds of the episcopal cheque. I promised him in return that I would try and restore your family fortunes by showing myself in a circus when we reached England.”

“And what have you done with your father?” Titania inquired. A wistful sadness drove away the giantess’s glistening smile. A tear, no smaller than

a sea-gull's egg, shattered itself to crystal fragments at her feet.

"Poor darling!" she murmured, and her lower lip trembled perilously, "he fell overboard. Oh, quite an accident! He was terribly worried about the flying-fish: whether he ought to use a rod and line or shoot them on the wing. He got very annoyed, I remember, when the wireless operator refused to send his cable to the *Field* about it. I saw him muttering to himself as he walked away, then his foot slipped, and the next thing he was in the sea. It rather upset me, but somehow I don't think he

27

would have got on very well in London. There's really not much more to tell you. My childhood was fearfully dull—nothing but growing and eating. My father used to tell me my mother was frightened by a whale just before I was born; but then he always believed the things nobody else would, out of sheer kindness of heart."

"And are you going to marry Malahide?" asked Sebastian.

"No, he's far too frightened of me."

While telling her story Miss Harkaway, or Bill, as we may well call her from now on, had been leaning back on her haunches with the family arranged round her in a semicircle, but even so her head was some two feet above the tallest of them.

"I suppose you're terribly strong," said Phœbe, who never made any but the most obvious remarks.

Bill leant forward, fastened her teeth in Malahide's coat collar, and swung him several times quickly round her head; then, hooking her little finger into the back of his braces she lowered him gently into his chair.

"Of course I'm strong!" she smiled and flicked a piece of tweed from her teeth, "you don't want me to go about breaking things to show you that. I can take you all for a ride on my back if you like." She got on all fours invitingly.

"Let's try it, Hilary," said Lady Cadwallow.

"If you say so, my dear, very well, of course; they used to say I could ride anything." And so, for five minutes, under the supervision of Lightfoot, who had been standing respectfully behind his master's chair, Bill carried them safely round the room until a

28

splinter ran into her finger. Sebastian took it out for her and was rewarded with another of those beautiful slow smiles. Titania suddenly jumped to her feet, and her eyes were sparkling. "I've just thought of something most important," she said, and ran out of the room.

"Don't you find it dreadfully inconvenient being so enormous?" Atalanta asked.

"Oh, you nit-wit, Atalanta, really you are deficient!" Sebastian had noticed poor Bill's dismay.

"I should think you must find it very inconvenient being so stupid, my dear," said Lord Cadwallow.

"Ah, don't bully her, poor thing."

"But we have to try and educate her, Miss Harkaway."

"Oh, please call me Bill!"

Already the family were quite enchanted. Soothed by her gentle voice and soft smile, they seemed to forget their customary bickerings. Even Wycliffe left off clapping his murderous paws at a drowsy moth, which he had started from a heap of rubbish in the corner, and settled himself in the front of the fire, giving, with his hind leg cocked over his shoulder for washing purposes, a very fair imitation of a banjo-player. It was Lady Cadwallow who pricked this little bubble of tranquillity, but she spoke with less than her accustomed sharpness.

"I suppose you eat a great deal, my dear?"

"I'm afraid I do, rather, Lady Cadwallow."

"But perhaps you're not very particular ..."

"Really, Mummy," said Sebastian, "you don't mean to suggest that any one who was what you

29

call very particular, could eat the food in this house. I will not have you trying to feed the poor girl on dog biscuits."

"I sh-shouldn't w-worry about B-Bill," interrupted Malahide, "she'll be feeding the lot of you before long. We're going round to see the agents about a circus to-morrow."

"I remember a circus once ..." Lord Cadwallow began.

"Daddy, don't dodder!" the children immediately chanted in chorus. For such was their established custom when he began a reminiscence in anything but a minor key. But at that moment the door burst open, and Titania, hand in hand with Macgillivray, fairly danced into the room.

“Listen!” she cried, “I’ve got the most magnificent idea ... Macgillivray says he’ll put up the money for Miss Harkaway to be a professional boxer ... no one will be able to stand up against her, she’ll be a far greater sensation than Camera ever was, and she’ll make a fortune and become a terrific social success, and we shall eat decent food and furnish the house properly, and get Cardinal Manning out of pawn, and Daddy will be able to make his maiden speech in the House of Lords and ...” Titania stopped, breathless; ... the Macgillivray walked over to the Giantess, stood on a chair and held up his hand.

“How do you do? My name is Ballas. How do you do?” He began: “A most attractive proposition, that is if you don’t mind boxing ... you won’t get hurt, of course—we shall not inform the Press until a fight has been arranged. I hope they don’t know

30

about you already? ...” The Macgillivray became surprisingly practical whenever he was contemplating a new activity. “You’ll soon learn to box, it’s very easy in spite of what they say. No need for you to learn even, but you might as well ... won’t cost much ... I’ll pay ... pay for everything ... give parties ... make people meet you ... make them look fools.”

“O, Bill, do say you will!” Titania pleaded.

“I will most certainly,” answered the giantess. “I hadn’t thought of it before, but it looks like money for nothing. No! the papers don’t know anything about me. The captain of the ship threatened to betray me to the *Daily Express*, but I threatened him with violence in return. I’ll start whenever you like.”

Lord Cadwallow thought it time for him to put in a dignified protest.

“But, really,” he said, “we cannot allow you to do all this—why should we benefit through you?”

“Nonsense!” said the giantess ... “If it wasn’t for Malahide I should still be in Australia, and, anyway, if you adopt me, of course you have a share of my profits. It’s the Macgillivray I’m thinking of.”

“No need to think about me ... only too delighted ... I insist, I insist, I insist! Waiting for an opportunity like this ever since they turned me out of Oxford for giving a party in the Clarendon Building. Heaven-sent you are, Miss Harkaway, heaven-sent. What an excuse for entertainment ... I’ll amaze their palates this time!” and this restless Mæcenās began to pull Titania’s hair in his delirium.

Sebastian looked anxiously at Bill. "Are you sure you won't get hurt?" he said.

"I shouldn't worry, Sebastian. Look, I'm not even standing up straight ... Camera himself would scarcely come up to my waist."

"The difficulty will be," said Atalanta, "that they'll only be able to hit you below the belt."

"Perhaps she could wear it lower down," Phœbe suggested.

Dinner, and the interval till bed-time passed in planning the details of Bill's career. The Macgillivray and Titania were fertile with extravagant schemes, while Bill and Sebastian lent their constructive criticisms. Malahide spread truffles on brown bread and butter, washing down the slices with champagne out of a white kitchen tea cup. Wycliffe, his tail decorated in honour of the occasion by Lightfoot, with a pink ribbon, crouched low over a cod's head. Altogether it was the gayest evening that the dining-room of Cadwallow House had ever witnessed.

By midnight a working programme had been arranged, and several sheets of paper covered with the various items. Sebastian, who was to retire from pawnbroking' and Malahide, with, when necessary, the help of Phœbe, and Atalanta and Lightfoot, were to see to the equipment of Bill's wardrobe and furnish the house in proportion to her size, while the Macgillivray and Titania were to negotiate with fight promoters and have her taught to box. When all was settled a shake-down was made for the giantess out of four mattresses. The Macgillivray said "Good night," and the family retired to bed.

But they were far too excited to sleep at once. Phœbe and Atalanta saw visions of their children growing up without need of assistance from the state. Titania wove for herself a series of splendid fantasies in which she and the Macgillivray gave parties of phenomenal riot and eccentricity. Sebastian, in his little camp bed under the eaves, congratulated Malahide and thought he had never met a girl so quiet and sensible, and finally dozed off to dream of the soft brightness of her red and white smile. "Duke Godfrey," said Lord Cadwallow, as he folded and laid away his Paisley shawl in a drawer, "ought I to write my speech or make it *ex tempore*?" To which his wife replied, "How can you write it when you don't know what

it's going to be about.... What did you say? ... as if that mattered! ... Now stop talking nonsense and get into bed and tell me what you think about having the drawing-room done up, and thank God for your good fortune."

Lightfoot alone felt a little uneasy, and confided to Wycliffe that he thought Miss Harkaway a very charming young lady, but he feared the holes in her stockings would be something tremendous.

As for the source of all these speculations she lay staring up at the library ceiling, stretching, from time to time, her limbs cramped by so much kneeling. But she was not particularly excited. Bill's was one of those calm dispositions which re-act evenly to all kinds of circumstances. She liked the Cadwallows, particularly Sebastian, who quite enchanted her with his neat movements and kind, brown eyes. They were mad, of course, but exceedingly

33

charming, and she was glad to think she would be able to help them. Still, it was a pity all their books were at the pawnbroker's—a pity, too, that Malahide had dropped her Shakespeare into the English Channel, for she felt at home among the swelling personages of tragedy. The violence of their feelings magnified them, in her eyes, until, in contemplating them, she was able to lose the consciousness of her own hugeness. After a time, as sleep was still denied, she began to examine her past existence. Why, really, Malahide was the first friend she had ever had. When she was very young, it would be absurd to say small, no children ever played with her; they were far too frightened. All her short life timid people had fled from her, while others pestered her with their curiosity until she had to abandon the idea of mixing with her fellow-creatures, and when she walked abroad she chose an unfrequented place and lonely time of day. Even her father she used to catch looking at her with a trace of fear in his eyes. Malahide, after recovering from his initial shock, was the first person to talk to her as a normal human being. And now here was his entire family treating her the same, only without Malahide's natural shyness. No doubt it was their own eccentricity which accounted for this. If one was mad oneself it might have that effect. Moreover, so many people divided their experience into water-tight compartments—separating the odd from the natural. But she could quite imagine any one of the Cadwallows saying to themselves, "A girl nine feet high, why, what's so very odd in that? Not half so odd as the House of Commons!"

Then after a faint ripple of excitement, stimulated by anticipation of the new people she would meet, and the possible adventures ahead of her, any apprehensions she might have had gave way to comfortable security in the sure, if dilapidated, stronghold of the Cadwallows', and Bill fell asleep.

CHAPTER III

IT was a slithery wet morning in Camden Town High Street; one of those mornings when heavy rain is not content with beating down upon the human head, but steals upwards from the pavement through the soles of shoes. Professor Thomas poked his head cautiously out of the door of his Academy of Physical Culture, Gymnastics and the Noble Art of Self-Defence. He had been selected by the Macgillivray to teach the giantess to box, and had already been given a substantial cheque in return for his promise of secrecy.

Professor Thomas believed in catching them young.... "The proper age to start training," he used to say, "is eight." And this accounted for the presence of half a dozen urchins who were, at that moment, squabbling in the gymnasium. "Those nippers," he would continue to an imaginary audience, "will make my fortune in fifteen years' time—and their own, for that matter, you see if they don't."

This morning, however, with more important business on the horizon, he dismissed the kindergarten an hour before their time, crackling further

35

instructions at them as they scrambled out of the building. "Now then, an eight mile walk ... Hammersmith and back ... don't forget your exercises ... Tim, you didn't do your time on the bars this morning."

"Yes, I did, sir!"

"Did he, Jack?"

"No, sir."

"Please, sir, he's broken his training again, sir, he's been eating whelks and butterscotch."

"Have you, Tim?"

"No, sir."

"Well, run away, all of you, and don't let me catch you within a mile of the place until this evening."

Their little feet went slapping away over the slimy pavement, and the Professor, with a curse at the rain, and an admiring glance at the rococo, gilt and poster decorated facade of his Academy, walked smartly up the steps, pointing his toes like a dancing-master.

Presently a tarpaulin-covered lorry drew up at the door discharging Sebastian and Bill, the latter—arriving for her first lesson—bent nearly double in order not to attract attention.

The little pugilist had already been informed of Bill's dimensions, but, even so, it was some time before he could master his surprise. "Well, I never did!" he remarked, as he pranced round her, twitching at the tails of his greenish morning coat, and gazing up at her lofty face. "I've seen 'em big before, but nothing like you, miss. I declare, I thought the Macgillivray was trying to pull my leg." He got a step-ladder and clambered up to

36

feel Bill's muscles. "Heavyweight Champion of the world, indeed! I should think so, if you can get any of them to come inside the ropes with you. You'll be getting the Cruelty to Children's Association on your track, I shouldn't wonder." And he began asking Bill intimate questions about her physiological history—had she stopped growing? what did she weigh when she was born? did she think it was anything to do with her diet?—but Sebastian interrupted him, for he knew how embarrassing the giantess found such catechisms.

"Now then, Thomas, what about this boxing—we haven't got much time!"

"All right, all right, sir," said the professor. "Now, miss, if you'll just step inside the ring and pay attention to me. Mind you don't bump your head!" He proceeded to demonstrate the elementary positions and leads. "Your chief difficulty, miss," he explained, "will be getting near enough to your man to be able to hit him, and unless we can make you pretty quick about the ring I can quite imagine you losing on points, although, you'll never get hurt, of course—they won't be able to reach you. Now let me see you try a lead with the left."

Bill lunged forward and shot out her left fist. "That's the way!" said the Professor, "but you'll have to hit downwards at a steep angle—try again at my head ... that's it, very good ... I shouldn't bother to keep your right arm up there, they'll never be able to reach that far—now then, keep following me round the ring as if you was trying to hit me."

But this proved to be disastrous, for as the

37

giantess sprang after the nimble professor she bumped her head savagely against one of the girders supporting the roof of the gymnasium.

“Poor darling!” cried Sebastian, greatly dismayed.

“Never mind, I’m not hurt, but I don’t think there’s enough room for me here, professor.”

“You want a nice gymnasium fitted up for you, miss—about twenty feet high—then you’ll be all right.”

“Tell you what!” said Sebastian—“we can use the ball-room at home, there’s room for an elephant there—oh, Bill, I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean that, oh, please forgive me!”

Bill smiled down on him. “It’s all right,” she said, “you mustn’t get too afraid of hurting my feelings or you won’t be able to open your mouth.”

“The very place!” said the professor. “I’ll make a list of the things you want, have them ordered and sent round, how will that be? Then we’ll start training to-morrow; I’ll be round at eleven sharp. My word, but you’ll knock ’em! Talk about Camera, why, he was a midget compared with you! I’ll keep my mouth shut, never fear! The Macgillivray stopped it up for me. Charming gentleman, the Macgillivray, eccentric, of course, but he’d be a difficult one to hit, you know ... never keeps still for a moment. Well, good morning to you, miss, don’t forget you’ve always got to hit downwards. Good morning, sir.”

“I don’t think this boxing business is going to be so very difficult,” said Bill, as they drove away. “Sit on my knee, Sebastian, you’ll find it much more

comfortable than the floor, and there’ll be more room for my legs.”

“But, Bill, what I’m afraid of is that you’ll have to do so much stooping ... you know you told me you’ve lived mostly out of doors.”

“How thoughtful you are, Sebastian. Still it won’t be for so very long. I daresay I shall be able to make quite a lot of money in a year, and then I can retire and build a really large house in the country with everything the right size.”

“I am afraid I must seem a miserable pygmy to you, Bill.”

“No, you don’t. It’s only the people who gaze at me as if I were a freak who seem pygmies. But they’re quite reasonable, I suppose, really. Now, Sebastian, you don’t mean to tell me that you don’t, in your heart of hearts, think me a monstrosity ...”

“Well, honestly, you know, Bill, I don’t. Of course, I know you could break me in pieces if you wanted to, but that hasn’t really anything to do with it. Of course, you’re large, but you’re not at all ungainly, Bill. In fact, you’re very graceful. I’ve only known you about twelve hours, and I can’t help rather feeling that you belong to another planet, but if you *are* a goddess you certainly seem to walk very easily amongst men.”

“I’m entirely human, really, Sebastian—except——”

“Except when?” “Oh, never mind, I’ll tell you another time.”

“One thing, Bill, I don’t feel conscious of being so small when I’m with you.”

“Why, Sebastian?”

39

“Because every one else is at the same disadvantage, and an extra foot or so makes no difference.”

“Oh!”

“Now, Bill, don’t take offence at that, please don’t——”

“I didn’t!”

“And we shall always be friends, Bill, because you know no giant has ever been complete without a dwarf in attendance—I’ll be Panurge to your Pantagruel and you shall be Glumdalclitch to my Gulliver.”

“And you must educate me, Sebastian,” said Bill a little sadly, “and tell me what to read besides Shakespeare, because I haven’t met any of those characters you mention, and I know I ought to have.”

Then they smiled up and down at each other, and the lorry stopped at the doors of Cadwallow House.

• • • • •

The rest of the day had been set apart for dressmakers and hatmakers, shoemakers, hairdressers, and other decorators of the human exterior. Titania and the Macgillivray were determined that Bill should be as smart as money could make her.

The red drawing-room at Cadwallow House was a-flutter with elegant young persons, and its dim recesses echoed the hungry scissor-snips of those bard-faced old ladies, the milliners. As for the less genteel ranks of the army of adornment, such as hairdressers and bootmakers, they stood apart at a respectful distance and twirled their wax moustaches. When they saw Bill, they let out a gasp of amazement and gathered together in a far corner.

The situation having been taken firmly in hand by Sebastian, we may leave the red drawing-room at Cadwallow House and follow the progress of Titania and the Macgillivray in their search for an opponent.

These young people, well aware that business in England is sorely interfered with by the licensed hours, began their day with glasses of sherry at the Ritz, whose customary and soothing gloom had been most indecently brightened by two suits of armour and a large Christmas tree. Here, in two armchairs on the platform beside the tinkling fountain, they discussed their campaign.

The Macgillivray was still in his businesslike mood. He had a list of names spread out before him and was successfully holding Titania's attention.

"The obvious difficulty," he was saying, "is that we don't want to tell them too much as yet, and how else are we going to catch their attention. Mind my feet, you careless Pharaoh!" (This last remark was addressed to a nervous Egyptian gentleman who was passing their table.) "As I was saying just now, the difficulty is how to show them the tail of the cat without letting the whole beast out of the bag."

"Well, anyway, let's have lunch. All this shivering excitement has made me hungry. Afterwards we can go and see somebody."

So they went downstairs to the Grill, and ate away the time until three o'clock.

The offices of Marcus Stone, who was the first on the Macgillivray's list, were in a small street off the post-Cambridge Circus end of Shaftesbury Avenue. Titania and the Macgillivray were greeted by a

flock of golden-haired typists who rose at them like driven partridges, with a cry of, "Yeth, Mithter Thtone hath jutht come in, thith way, pleathe."

Marcus Stone was sitting at his desk reading the gossip column of the *Daily Express*. "Good morning," he said. "What can I do for you?"

The Macgillivray outlined the situation with plentiful references to a woman of enormous size.

"Truly enormous size, I assure you——"

The promoter laughed. "No, no, I don't go in for circuses ... not my line of business at all."

The Macgillivray became extremely angry. “Oh, isn’t it ... well, let me tell you, wretched ghetto-snipe, that it’s jolly well going to be!”

“Don’t take any notice of him, Mr. Stone,” said Titania, “he’s always abusive.”

“If you knew how rich I was, you’d soon stop jutting your blue chin at me!”

And, after some more peace-making from Titania, they came to terms. “You go and arrange about the Albert Hall,” said Stone, “and I’ll get you a man. He’ll cost something though, I can tell you. These guys aren’t going to run the risk of being made fools of and juggled for wife-beating into the bargain.”

“So long as they don’t mind being hurt, it won’t matter so much,” said Titania. And with that they went off to hire the Albert Hall, getting back to Cadwallow House in time for tea.

“I hope,” said Titania, as the Macgillivray’s Mercedes, which was upholstered in the ancestral tartan, screamed up Portland Place, “that Lightfoot will have remembered to order me some more clothes; you don’t mind, Macgillivray, do you?”

42

After all, we might as well do the thing properly, mightn’t we? I heard Phœbe and Atalanta discussing what they were going to get last night, and Mummy said she was going to have an enormous hat with room for a bird-bath on top of it.”

“I don’t mind that at all; in fact, I positively encourage it.”

“As Slob said the other day—he said it to the table in the hall, you know, that square one he calls Heliogabalus—‘My poor dear wife is not a woman at all, Heliogabalus, she’s a Christmas pantomime, that’s what she is!’ ”

They found the library deserted except for Sebastian and Bill. He was sitting on her knee reading to her random selections from the *Oxford Book of English Verse*, while the giantess drank tea from a pint pot.

“Get up, you little decadent,” said Macgillivray. “Good afternoon, Miss Harkaway, we’ve taken the Albert Hall for New Year’s Eve, and a fearful brute called Marcus Stone has promised to find somebody for you to knock down. Where’s the rest of the brood?”

“Malahide has taken them to the cinema—first time Slob and Dotty have ever been inside one—Bill and I are too exhausted after all the fitting—oh, it’s all right, Titania, Lightfoot remembered your clothes.”

“I see they’ve done your hair very nicely, Bill—sit on the floor and let me see—really she looks lovely, doesn’t she, Macgillivray?” And, indeed, the rippling, silky hair, neatly cut and waved, was most attractive.

43

“Poor lamb,” said Sebastian, “she’s had an awful time, they would not stop staring at her. That ass, Lady Pyrrhus Victor, kept on saying, ‘*Is it cold up there?*’ until Malahide lost his temper. And the man from Clobbs’ was deaf, of course, and Bill had to shout at him, and that frightened Walter Kidney, who was trying to measure her waist, out of his wits. But the worst thing is that she won’t have anything to wear for a week. We almost had to thrash them into promising they would rig up something for her to box in to-morrow morning.”

“The one I couldn’t stand,” said Bill, and she held out a hand to exhibit a row of gleaming pink shields, “was that awful little man who cut my nails, toes and all, you know. He insisted on picking up the pieces—said his little boy would like them for his museum. I didn’t want to hurt his feelings, but I thought it was rather impertinence.”

“Well,” Titania murmured, “if you look as nice as that in a red velvet curtain, whatever will you be like when your clothes arrive!”

Presently Lightfoot came to clear away, and Titania questioned him about her wardrobe.

“You didn’t forget to tell them about those flounces on the afternoon frocks?”

“No, miss, I did not, and I ordered a dozen more sets of what-you-may-call-’ems because the wash has lost us nearly the whole lot, to say nothing of the three your poor dear mother absent-mindedly gave to Wycliffe for his bedclothes, when the cold snap was on. I told him, miss, that *crêpe de Chine* was too good for cats, but he only growled and waved his tail.”

44

“Did he, Lightfoot? What insolence!”

“Yes, miss, and I said, ‘Wycliffe,’ I said, ‘you had no right to accept those garments of Miss Titania’s, trading on her Ladyship’s aberrations like that.’ And, would you believe it, miss, he winked his yellow eye at me as evil as a Christian—indeed, he did.”

“Thank you so much, Lightfoot, for the help you gave *me* with *my* clothes,” said Bill, “I don’t know what I should have done without you.”

“Not at all, miss, a pleasure, I’m sure, and, if I may say so, I think you’ll look a perfect picture, miss, when you wear them. I hope Mr. Kidney will have taken my advice about that slashed skirt. He’s got plenty of ideas, that young man has, but it’s tact you want in dressmaking, miss. Still, he knows I know a thing or two ... now who can that be, I wonder? I thought their film wasn’t over till six-thirty.”

Lady Cadwallow came striding into the library; her hat was on one side of her head at an abrupt angle; her good-natured face, usually red, had turned to dusky purple. Phœbe, Atalanta, and Malahide, all three of them giggling, walked behind and disentangled their father from his Paisley shawl.

“Really, Hilary,” Lady Cadwallow spluttered, “you usually behave abominably, I know; but to be turned out, and at this time of the evening, and at your time of life. You are no better than Crippen.”

“But, my dear, how was I to know? You, yourself, have never been to one of these places before. Of course I thought I was at liberty to ...”

“Quick, Malahide,” interrupted the Macgillivray, “what happened?”

45

“We w-w-went to the P-P-Patio to see one of those t-talking films,” said Malahide, “and of course d-daddy thought they were talking to him, so when one of the characters was asked what the time was, and answered, ‘Six thirty,’ the old fool jumped up and bellowed, ‘I make it a quarter to!’ at the top of his voice, and when the attendant told him to be quiet, he said he wasn’t going to be quiet and have people misinformed like that, so they made a scene and we were run out.”

Lord Cadwallow, in the way that so many old men have of turning to strangers for confirmation, looked at Bill.

“I’m delighted you agree with me, my dear,” he said, “scandalous inaccuracy.... I know, because I set my watch going to-day for the first time in twenty-four years. The next time I go to one of those places you shall come with me, and together we will defy them.”

“If I may say so, miss,” Lightfoot whispered into Titania’s ear, “it all comes of their not taking me with them. As you know, miss, I have a peculiar knack of communicating information to his lordship.”

CHAPTER IV

THE smack of leather against flesh, the springy pounding of nimble feet, the creaking of padded ropes; these assorted sounds rang through the lofty ball-room, causing the chandeliers to jangle, for Bill was engaged on what Professor Thomas described as

46

a workout. Wearing thick white silk trousers and a tunic of black bearskin in order to induce, as her trainer put it, a glowing muck sweat, and with enormous pudding shaped gloves, stuffed with feathers, on her hands, she danced about the ring in furious pursuit of her sparring partner. This was a negro, nicknamed "Snowdrop." By ordinary standards he was of gigantic stature. In relation to the giantess, however, he might have been one of those little blackamoors, so fashionable in the eighteenth century, who fluttered round their mistresses like pinnaces escorting a frigate.

"Stick it, Snowdrop," shouted the professor, "keep out of her way as long as you can—don't try and hit her—she won't feel it."

Weaving, dodging, ducking, and side-stepping, Snowdrop evaded Bill's attempt to drive him into a corner only to be pushed back against the ropes. It was easy for Bill; with one arm she pinned down her opponent as if he were a butterfly, and struck him from far outside his own reach with the other. This plan could scarcely fail to succeed at least once in twenty, and once was more than enough. The day before it had put Snowdrop out for two minutes, and by this, which was the morning of their third encounter, all the gallant African's scruples about hitting a white woman had vanished.

Realising that he had not long to remain on his feet, he dropped to one knee and sprang inwards and upwards, delivering a fierce right to the body. Bill grunted, so gently that only Sebastian heard her. For a moment she smiled down on Snowdrop's woolly head.

47

"Don't flirt with him," bawled the professor, "uppercut him!"

Then, with a murmur of, "What a shame it all is," as Snowdrop straightened himself for a futile attempt to reach her jaw, she swung her right; and, in a whirl of limbs, the negro sailed over the ropes, to land and bounce on the double spring mattresses which covered the floor.

The professor stepped into the ring. "Now then, miss," he said sharply, "no sentiment this morning, please. Mr. Sebastian will look after Snowdrop. You really mustn't be so tender-hearted, miss. Believe me, he's well paid for his work, and he'd 'a hit you 'ad he been able. Now I want you to try a go with young Micky here. Go light with him, miss, because he's only a featherweight. Keep her on the move, Mick, and there's a quid in it if she doesn't hit you in three rounds."

Micky, a fair youth with a cauliflower ear, was, although only seventeen, already well on the way towards becoming a champion. Indeed, some said that for speed and artistry of boxing there was not his equal in the country. He grinned politely at Bill as they shook hands high above his head.

At the end of two rounds the little creature was still untouched. He scampered about, twisting and turning like a leaf in a gale, and twice escaped from a corner by running through Bill's legs. But, at length, she caught him, and registered her victory with the lightest of taps on his nose.

The professor was delighted and clambered on top of a cabinet in order to congratulate his pupil at close quarters; but she, with her usual thoughtfulness,

48

was already ministering to the recumbent Snowdrop.

"Let me get at him, miss," said Thomas. And Bill picked him off the cabinet. "Tickle up the nerve endings—that's the way to wake him. No good stroking his forehead, only send him to sleep."

Tickling up the nerve ends was a process which consisted of pinching the negro's nose and eyebrows, and shaking his face from side to side. In a short time Snowdrop opened and rolled his eyes, and sat up.

"Well, Miss Bill," he said, "Ah may be only a poor, uneducated coloured man, but even if you was to honour me by asking me to be your husban' Ah'd say Ah would refuse most certainly, but no offence."

"That'll teach you, Snowdrop," said the professor, referring somewhat maliciously, perhaps, to an incident which had cost the African two years of his liberty, "that'll teach you not to hit a lady again, white or black."

"Ah'd rather stay in the jail-house at Memphis until de day ob judgment than lay another finger on Miss Bill, professor, sure I would. You know, Miss Bill, it's a most 'straordinary ting but Ah guess you done been lucky for me. De Voodoo-woman tol' me once. She says, 'Boy,' she says, 'you won't hab no good luck, no, not for a long time,' an' den she looks at de

pictures in de sand, and she says, ‘But, oh boy, when you meets a swell white lady who done puts you to sleep wid her fist in your mouf, den you’s e in fo’ good luck till yo’ die in yo, bed, at a ripe old age.’ Yes sir, and how!”

“I don’t believe a word of it,” said Sebastian, who

49

had some experience of the verbosity of negroes when encouraged, having met them at parties.

“Well, Massa Sebastian, no more did Ah until Ah done woke up jus’ now, but b’lieve me or b’lieve me not, and Ah’m only a poor uneducated coloured man, but dis is de most ‘straordinary ting I eber saw.”

The rest of the morning was spent in baths, massage, ball punching, and every conceivable form of exercise under the careful supervision of the professor.

“You may think, miss,” he explained, “that all this training’s unnecessary like, and I know you’ll put your man out all right, but it may take you a bit of time before you catch him, and you’ll want to look your best before the Prince and all those quality, now, won’t you? It wouldn’t do at all for a handsome young lady like yourself to be seen puffing and blowing, as it were. So that’s why we do all these exercises.”

And with that the little worthy took himself and his attendants away for lunch.

• • • • •

A fortnight later it was settled that Bill’s first fight was to be contested against a boxer called Heber, known familiarly as “Bishop” Heber, on account of the coincidence of names, and—but this was only alleged—the startling resemblance of his physiognomy to that of the eminent divine. “Bishop” was a craftsman of undoubted ability as well as the most terrifying proportions. And, had it not been for his supreme disregard of the rules, which had caused him to be disqualified times

50

without number, and finally suspended for ever by the Board of Control, there is little doubt that his beetling brows would have been encircled by the heavyweight laurel wreath. His record, as his old grandmother, who supervised his training, used proudly to boast, was, “Won sixty-eight fights, and lost forty-two, forty-one of which were fouts, and the other early on in

the poor boy's career when he was awash with gin through no fault of his own!"

But as the Macgillivray was promoting the contest, such a break with orthodoxy as the reappearance of Heber in the boxing ring was no concern of the sporting authorities. "And very lucky I was to get him, so cheap, and all," Maurice Stone told Titania over the telephone. "He's a big draw, is Bishop Heber ... won't be ashamed to hit a lady either. I should warn your friend she's in for a rough evening."

"I doubt if it will worry her," Titania had answered rather coldly for she had become infected with some of the Macgillivray's contempt for Stone.

"Oh, all right, all right, Mr. Stone, we've already promised you your name won't be mentioned.

A few days later Heber came to Cadwallow House for the signing of the contract. Snowdrop was loud in his expressions of contempt when it was discovered that he did not know how to write and could only trace a sprawling cross in the space provided for "Bishop Heber—his mark."

Meanwhile the Press, carefully handled by the Macgillivray, whose influence in that quarter was, as we have already learnt, considerable, had been allowed to blare forth unrestrainedly intimate, "human stories" of the giantess, and in a few days

51

Bill found herself a figure of national importance. The news had been held back at first, to filter through to the front page by way of the gossip writers, who treated it like this:—"Miss Harkaway, who is staying over Christmas with Lord and Lady Cadwallow, is, undoubtedly, the tallest girl in Society this year, for she is nine feet high (this is a little less than four feet taller than Lady Doris Tingad who used to make us all feel such midgets). Miss Harkaway's mother was, of course, one of the Staffordshire Huckleburys." While downstairs in the News Editors' Room many an enterprising reporter was disappointed at being told "to leave that giantess story alone for the present." But when Macgillivray allowed the flood gates to be opened, headlines such as these:—"PEER'S FAMILY ADOPT GIANTESS NINE FEET HIGH," poured forth in abundance. There was no mention of boxing, however, for this was to be secret until a few days before the fight.

Inevitably Cadwallow House was besieged by interviewers from every conceivable newspaper, and even the *Sunday Worker* allowed itself a comment on this new prank of a parasite aristocracy.

At first Bill was horribly embarrassed. "Surely all this isn't necessary?" she complained bitterly to Sebastian. "They don't interview me at all, they talk about themselves the whole time until I'm bored stiff, and then when it's published I have the most awful nonsense put in my mouth." But she suffered it without once losing her temper, and "Smiling Giantess" was rapidly worked to death by caption-writers.

The strangest feature of all this publicity was the

52

way in which it affected Lord Cadwallow. He began to display a vanity which even his wife had never suspected him of possessing. Not a single pressman was allowed to leave the house without his being shown into the library, where the old gentleman was busy correcting the type-script of his *History of Church Furniture*. It made the reporter's task very difficult, for they had the strictest instructions not to "guy the peerage," and yet his behaviour was so extremely peculiar that anything in the nature of the conventional interview was quite out of the question. "These are my opinions," he would volunteer, "on a number of subjects which I feel sure, in view of the fact that I am the thirty-third baron, and don't you forget to mention it either, young man, will be of the utmost interest to your readers." Then would follow a speech of import so fantastic, with ideas so contrary to the general opinion, that publication was utterly impossible. The experience was too much strain on the self-control of even the dignified special correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, who had to be sent away because his nose was bleeding.

When the thirty-third baron realised that he was not finding his way into serious print he became extremely angry; and, sad to relate, his family showed very little sympathy with him. Only Bill, with her unfailing kind heart, offered any consolation. "Never mind, old fellow," she assured him, when the *Morning Post* came out without a mention of Lord Cadwallow's infallible method of dealing with India, suggested the day before to their representative, "You wait until you make your maiden

53

speech in the House of Lords, then you'll be able to tell the country everything. Now come and have your photograph taken."

The photographers, who suffered no such restrictions, were only too delighted to let off their cameras at him, and in posing before them he soon

found compensation for editorial neglect. They began with a family group, taken under the skeleton of the mulberry tree on the lawn. Lord Cadwallow insisted on wearing his robes and coronet, but their dignity was lessened by the shortage of chairs, which necessitated his sitting in the giantess's lap. Later on, one agency managed to inveigle him into climbing on her back, and the result—THIRTY-THIRD BARON CADWALLOW RIDES ADOPTED DAUGHTER ROUND LONDON GARDEN—was instantly wirelessly to New York.

By this time Bill's clothes had arrived and been tried on. In most respects they followed the fashions of the day, with this difference, that she had insisted on her evening frocks being cut almost lower than was decently possible in order to save material, for the cost of covering that enormous surface area was astonishing. Her fur coat, for instance, would have made a luxurious carpet for a small room, and it was all Lightfoot could do to lift it. She had hats, conventionally tight round her skull, but which covered Titania's head like candle extinguishers, when she tried them on, their edges coming to rest on her shoulders. She had dresses for every occasion, and a "little," gold coat to wear over her shoulders in the evening. The high heels of her shoes were made of steel in order to bear her enormous weight.

When they arrived, Bill was a little shy of her new

54

clothes, and at first she seldom wore any but a tweed skirt, striped jersey, and fur coat for out of doors. After a few days she lost this shyness, and every morning she came down to breakfast in something different. Changing for dinner was effected with the assistance of Lightfoot and Titania, who valeted her from the tops of the step-ladders which were permanent fixtures in her bedroom. When she bathed she had to wash herself in sections and even so there were constant overflows of the water which her huge limbs displaced.

For Bill, the days before the fight slipped past each other in a whirl of new and often bewildering experiences. The morning was devoted to training, which began with a run round Regent's Park before breakfast. As it was clearly impossible for ordinary legs to keep up with the giantess's strides, Sebastian used to accompany her on a motor-bicycle. Very early in the morning, while it was yet dark, they would steal out of the house unknown to the rich, inquisitive crowds, of no fixed occupation, who daily,

and in all weathers, collected in the neighbourhood. Sebastian started first, and when Bill caught up with him they would settle down to a steady twenty-five miles an hour, with occasional short sprints, six times round the park. Very romantic, Bill found these early morning runs, as the sky lightened and the stars departed in that vague period between dawn and sunrise. Then, the only sounds in the Park, to alarm the inhabitants of the Zoo, were the padding of her feet and the insistent reports of the bicycle's exhaust-pipe. Often the two friends talked together as they went.

55

"Are you enjoying yourself?" Sebastian would shout.

"Yes, I love running," she would answer, "I feel as if my mouth was full of sharp cold stars."

They would talk of everything under the moon, or what of it remained in the sky, everything except Bill's career, for to Sebastian alone had she confessed what he called her "sorrows of a giantess," and how she looked forward to her escape, but feared it was impossible. "It won't do you any good," he told her during one of these confidences, "to shrink from publicity; let it come in a rush, and after a short time they'll think of you as somebody quite ordinary—like a royalty."

"That's all very well, Sebastian, you forget they've had plenty of time to get used to royalties, and they know there are heaps more where the others came from, but I'm the first proper-sized giantess since newspapers began, and I think they know there's not so likely to be another."

"Never mind," said Sebastian, "you'll get used to it in time, and there are a few sensible people, anyway, who don't gape at you."

When her morning's training was over (for, in spite of the disapproval of Professor Thomas, she refused to take any other set exercises, save a little deep breathing and shadow-boxing before going to bed) and when she had eaten, and rested after her lunch, which seldom weighed less than ten or twelve pounds, Bill, accompanied by some of the family, would explore London, taking care to visit show places such as the Tower, and Westminster Abbey at least twice a week in order to

56

be appropriately photographed. Of such, the Zoo, conveniently enough, was her favourite, and it was a pretty sight to see her standing between a couple of elephants with an arm round each of their necks. All the animals,

for that matter, took a liking to Bill who soon became a privileged person in the Gardens.

“How is my baby this morning?” she used to ask, on being admitted to the cage of Melchizedek, the adult orang-outang; and the great ape, whose restless fingers and orange fur reminded her irresistibly of the Macgillivray, would shamle forward, allowing her to nurse him in her arms as if she were, indeed, his mother.

Of the Macgillivray in person, it may be mentioned that little was seen in these days of waiting. He was busy making final preparations, both for the fight itself, and for the party afterwards at his house, which promised to be an entertainment of the most unusual variety. (“I hate other people’s parties!” he declared to Titania, as they bumped their heads over the invitation list, “so I’m going to see that other people—some of ’em, anyway—hate mine.”)

Sometimes, of an afternoon, Bill would go driving in the country in her car, a lorry which had been converted and upholstered to suit her convenience. It was driven by Malahide. Once, she took Lord Cadwallow out with her, but only once, for he was so frightened at the idea of being driven by one of his own sons as to make the adventure a positive agony for all concerned.

The greater part of her time, however, was spent in going about with Sebastian and Titania, meeting their friends and acquaintances. These formed a

57

bewilderingly conglomerate body; but they had one unmistakable quality in common. This was a tendency to turn every possible episode of their lives into a party. To give any satisfactory definition of a party Bill made no attempt; and rightly, for it is a phenomenon, the appreciation of which belongs strictly to the realm of intuitive knowledge. The only essential ingredient for a good party, she decided, was a kind of suspension in time; for a few hours the communicants floated a little above the earth’s surface, while the sphere revolved beneath them, and their feet were freed from its contemporary bird-lime.

As for the friends and acquaintances of Titania and Sebastian, from the vigour with which they lost themselves in the affairs of the moment, one would have imagined that each of their gatherings was some sort of Waterloo Ball, with a to-morrow shock and disaster rumbling in the

distance. After due observations, Bill, who could scarcely be expected to look upon strange human beings as anything other than the fauna of a newly discovered country, classified them into two groups according to location of habitat.

In the first group she put those who were to be found more or less permanently in their own or each other's houses, and in the second those who usually congregated in certain restaurants, public houses and places of amusement. At first she found it strange that members of the first group should be invariably richer than those of the second. "Surely," she said to herself, "it must be frightfully expensive always to drink and eat in public places—if they have so little money why don't they stay at home?"

58

And she was forced to conclude that their homes must be so unattractive as to be only fit for the purposes of sleep.

She also thought it strange that the two groups should overlap to such an extent. The sleek inhabitants of Mayfair had a disconcerting way of turning up in Bloomsbury public-houses at dinner time; and later on at somebody's party in Grosvenor Square, who should be there but the same tousled individuals whom she had last seen staggering away up Tottenham Court Road. But wherever she discovered them, both sub-species, rich or poor, smart or tattered, were invariably drinking, and often quarrelling over their love affairs, laughing meanwhile at their own jokes and incessantly scoring off each other with malicious remarks.

Sebastian, when she questioned him about such irregularities, gave her a delightfully pompous little discourse on the social strata of London. These, he said, were busy re-adjusting and developing themselves after the War. Wars, although they did not exactly make for sociability in spite of their alleged fostering of the team spirit, had, at any rate, the effect of springing copious leaks in the water-tight compartments into which society managed to divide itself. Soldiers became poets, money-lenders turned into country gentlemen, and artists found themselves seconding professional voters. Fleas had the impertinence to be felt at expensive hotels, while duchesses gave dinner-parties at the Chinese restaurant in the West India Dock Road.

"In fact," he told her, "London is much more like what we imagine it used to be in the early

59

eighteenth century, with the difference that all these people we meet are specialists in the art of doing nothing which is of the slightest importance. They spend the whole time chasing their own tails."

"Then why," remarked Bill, "do you make me spend so much time watching them chase them?"

But she soon found that, after a few initial stares, the tail chasers paid no more attention to her than if she had been of normal size. Perhaps they were too absorbed in their delicious pursuit, or perhaps there was already so much in their lives that most people would consider odd, as to make them see nothing so peculiarly phenomenal in a girl nine feet high and entirely in proportion. At any rate, they were preferable, in spite of being frequently rather boring and irritating, to the general public, which looked upon the giantess as a freak specially provided for their entertainment by an ingenious Almighty or a generous Press Lord.

A sample of the several evenings which were passed in this kind of company occurred a few days before Christmas. It began, for the giantess, in a public house a little way north of Oxford Street, a rendezvous that enjoyed, besides its perpetual gin-sipping old harridans, whose hind-quarters used to overflow across two stools at the bar, a clientele of a distinctly arty nature, and quite often serious discussions about literature and the arts would be carried on by whiskered buffoons, who sat around the fireplace in the curtained-off portion of the room. But it was not to take part in their windy chatter that Sebastian frequented the place. The public houses north of Oxford Street, no doubt, to

60

compensate them for their humble situation, have a convenient start of half-an-hour's drinking time in front of their rivals in the West End, and, consequently, those young men, nearly all of them known to Sebastian, who were bored with their clubs or too badly behaved to be members of any, and who had finished by lunch-time the gin left over in their flats from the night before, would be found waiting outside the doors at the opening hour of five.

On this particular evening, when Bill and Sebastian entered, a few of them were already seated, and drinking. They were gathered round an old lady, called Wanda Samson, a famous character in those parts, who, in spite of her brogue shoes, tweed coat and skirt, and a countenance hard and weather-beaten like that of a mistress of fox-hounds, was a sculptress of

considerable talent, who had been commissioned by the Macgillivray to do a life-size statue of the giantess.

“Yes,” she was chanting, as she waved her glass in the air, “I’m seventy-three to-day, hurray! ... Oh, so you’re a Russian, are you? well, my father was the Tsar, and I know the whole works. Sit down, Sebastian, what about you, Miss Harkaway. I doubt if the chairs will bear you.”

“It’s all right, thank you,” said Bill, “I’ve got my shooting stick.” This, which was made of steel, and five feet long, was an inspired idea of Lady Cadwallow’s, and Bill took it with her everywhere.

“We were just wondering, Sebastian,” said one of the young men, “where you and your family have been getting all this money from. I hear you’ve had the house done up and bought a car, and there is a

61

rumour about that your mother has been seen in a new hat. I suppose Miss Harkaway has done fairly well out of advertisements and writing articles, but I don’t see why you should take her money.”

“You’ll know soon enough,” Sebastian answered, “it’s money in advance for services which we are about to render, isn’t it, Bill?”

Presently they were joined by Titania, who was wearing some of her new clothes, and looking quite attractive in a clean scarlet hat.

“Macgillivray says he’s going to a party at that awful Dumbleton’s, and we’re to meet there,” she said. “He’s told her not to turn us out. You don’t know her yet, do you, Bill? Really, Sebastian, you’ve no idea how competent he’s been these last few days—he hasn’t played any of his usual tricks, and scarcely been rude to any one except Stone, of course, but even I have to be rude to him.”

“Who’s Stone?” asked Miss Samson. “Some fearful brute, I suppose, not that it matters. Do you remember the time he came in here, Titania, bringing a whole gang of ex-servicemen with him? He said he was taking them out to dinner to some fantastically expensive place. We thought it was rather odd at the time, but we heard afterwards that he disappeared in the middle of dinner and left them to pay the bill, which, of course, they couldn’t do.”

“Well, let’s all go and eat an absolutely swinish dinner,” said Titania, “and tell them to send him the bill. He’ll hate that!”

“Of all the ridiculous theories,” said Sebastian, a little irrelevantly, “which we put forward to account for the venomously mean behaviour of

rich people, there is nothing more absurd than the suggestion that they are afraid of being liked for their money. Why are they rich?—because if they made it themselves they were either very sharp, or very lucky—and why, if they inherit it, do they manage to keep it? Meanness again! They inherit their parent’s meanness along with their money.”

“Really, Sebastian,” Miss Samson interrupted, “you’re getting to be the most fearful bore, with all these pompous speeches.”

“Leave him alone,” said Bill, kindly. “I’m encouraging him to be pompous, I think it rather suits him.”

The dinner which followed was remarkable for the time spent in deliberating on what was most expensive, and the bill, across which Titania scribbled “Macgillivray of Ballas,” was acclaimed with triumph, for it amounted to no less than thirty-six pounds ten shillings, at least twenty pounds worth of which, as Miss Samson remarked, was accounted for by the giantess. It was also remarkable for the amount of good, heavy drinking put in by Miss Samson herself.

“I wonder—I wonder,” repeated that old lady to herself as they sat down.

“What are you wondering?” somebody asked her.

“I’m wondering whether I hadn’t better drink away now, and pass out shortly afterwards, or go steady and come on with you to these parties. I think, on the whole, it would be more sensible to make the best of it now—what do you think? The drink here is better than I’m likely to get anywhere else, and you know I’m not good at parties,

besides, the last time I went to the Caretaker’s Daughter’s house, there was only a thimbleful of gin and some kosher sandwiches. Anyhow, it’s my birthday.”

And she proceeded to polish off three bottles of burgundy and another of port, falling sound asleep immediately afterwards.

The three young gentlemen also acquitted themselves very creditably so far as the bottle was concerned, but they were all talking so loudly, and at once, that there were long intervals when they forgot to fill their glasses. Bill never learnt their real names for they called each other by those of famous—infamous usually—historical characters, such as Prinny, Duke of

Cumberland, Lord North. Sometimes they turned to Bill for confirmation of their assertions.

“I think that was pretty monstrous behaviour of Butcher Cumberland’s, don’t you, Miss Harkaway?”

“First Gentleman in Europe, how are you?”

“Lord North, your tongue’s dropping out of your mouth again. You’ll lose it as well as the Colonies.

“Don’t you think he’s very like Lord North, Miss Harkaway.”

“Watch me make Black Michael lose his temper, Miss Harkaway.”

“Fiddle-de-dee, you ugly Butcher, fiddle-de-dee!”

“See if you can make Black Michael make a pleasant remark about somebody, Miss Harkaway—he hasn’t admitted that he likes any one since he left school, and he’s so vindictive he sits on a camp-stool outside the Charing Cross Hospital watching the accident casualties being brought in.”

64

“Why do they all pretend so hard to be mad,” Bill whispered to Sebastian, “or are they really lunatics?”

It was Bill, also, who arranged for the disposal of Miss Samson.

“Where does Wanda live?” asked Titania when it was time to go. But nobody had the slightest idea. Some suggested that she slept under Adelphi Arches, and Black Michael, with characteristic brutality, was all in favour of leaving her in the gentlemen’s cloak-room. But, “No,” said Bill, “I’ll carry her along with us, she won’t be a nuisance.”

“Oh, won’t she!” snorted the Duke of Cumberland, “you just see if she isn’t!”

The first party was held in a small house off the Brompton Road, somewhere at the back of Harrods’, and definitely it was not a success. To begin with, the room was so low that poor Bill was unable to stand up. Moreover, not one of them had been asked. Black Michael had heard somebody say to somebody else, “Are you going to the so-and-so’s to-night?”—and that had been enough for him. The owner of the house received them, therefore, in a state of polite confusion. They did not stay very long. In order to demonstrate further that he was not afraid of coming without an invitation, Black Michael was persistently and violently rude to everybody in the room. He insulted a harmless negro who was playing the piano, he declared loudly what a pity it was that parties were not given without hosts. Finally, having drunk everything he could find, he bellowed,

“Not good enough!” at Sebastian, and stalked out. They followed him into Bill’s

65

car, and woke up the faithful Malahide, who was sleeping soundly in the driver’s seat.

“Don’t worry about Michael’s behaviour, Bill,” said Sebastian, “he’s well-known to be a monster, and anyway they’ll boast of your having been to their party for the next year.”

It was half-past twelve when they got to Miss Edwina Dumbleton’s in Belgrave Square. The great, pompous house blinked disdainfully at them from its numerous windows.

“I believe,” said Titania, with eager excitement, “it’s one of what she calls her *little* parties when there are five hundred people—what a good thing we aren’t changed, she’ll be so furious.” But the Caretaker’s Daughter had anticipated their arrival, for the butler who opened the door led them into a small room at the far end of the hall.

“Miss Dumbleton told me to ask if you wouldn’t mind waiting in here,” he said, coldly, “as the Macgillivray has not come yet.”

“That’s one in the eye for us!” Bill remarked, as she deposited the still slumbering Miss Samson on a sofa.

“Thinks we’ll be proud and go away at once, I suppose,” boomed Black Michael, “that’s an old dodge. I’ve had that tried on me many a time. Anyway, she hasn’t bargained for Wanda, I’m certain. Wake up, Wanda, and be sick or something.” He pinched Miss Samson’s nose, but she only responded with a hiccough.

They waited ten minutes until the door opened and the Macgillivray appeared with Miss Dumbleton’s chin over his shoulder. He was clearly in a high

66

state of excitement, and exclaimed, when he saw them——

“Kept in the servants’ hall, are you? ... quite right!”

Miss Dumbleton remarked, “Of course, I wasn’t going to let them go about fouling the place without some one to look after them. Is that your giantess? (“Oh, what awful manners!” Titania murmured.) Why, she looks quite respectable. I suppose you can come upstairs!”

“If we must,” said Sebastian, “only, knowing what your parties are like, we’d prefer to stay down here, or go somewhere else.”

“God above!” the Macgillivray screamed, “if it isn’t Wanda—drunk, of course—the fearful old harpy. Wake up, you broken-down prophetess, wake up!” He turned towards Bill, and showed her the front page of the early edition of the next day’s paper—“Look!” he said, “I’ve just been watching it go to press!” There, splashed in double column, was the announcement that the giantess was to fight Bishop Heber. The Macgillivray read it aloud, and they were suitably astonished, with the exception of Miss Samson who unexpectedly sat up straight.

“If you’re fighting Heber, my girl,” she said to Bill, “you be careful.... I know a thing or two about the ring, and he’ll foul you, certain he will.”

CHAPTER V

AT a quarter to seven on the evening of the fight, the last evening of the Old Year, Bill was dressing for dinner, and her boxing clothes were already packed in a suitcase which was lying open on the bed. They were dining with the Macgillivray before going to the Albert Hall.

Since Christmas Eve, when the contest had been announced in the Press, she had scarcely been outside Cadwallow House, except for her early morning runs, so overwhelming had grown the publicity which surrounded her. Even now, it was still doubtful whether the fight would take place, and perhaps at that very moment the Home Secretary was biting his fingers over a petition to stop it.

The newspapers had divided themselves into three camps. The first, headed by the *Morning Post*, protested against the disgustingly decadent and pernicious spectacle of a woman competing in what was not far removed from a gladiatorial combat, with a man as her opponent. The second, led by the more radical paper, called upon the Government to forbid the orgiastic massacre which must inevitably take place, when the unfortunate Heber was confronted, in the ring, with this gigantic creature, who clearly belonged to another universe and another species. The third, represented by the *Daily Express*, treated the affair as a grotesque joke, and published leading articles which were clearly meant to be funny. But, on all sides, the Macgillivray and Lord Cadwallow came in for any amount of vilification and ridicule,

68

and, in some quarters, it was even suggested they should be deported. *The Times*, as usual, took care to be sane and well-balanced, pointing out that the Macgillivray, as a private individual, had a perfect right to hire the Albert Hall, and there was nothing actually illegal in the proceedings. It went on to give its measured opinion that Heber should win comfortably on points, provided he kept out of his opponent's way for ten rounds. As for the social gossip writers, their space was full of the giantess and her relatives by adoption. Forgotten, for the moment, were the activities of all their usual pet subjects. Instead it was Miss Harkaway this, and Lady Cadwallow that, to the exclusion of everybody, bright young people, dull

old devils and all, except persons of the highest importance, and particular friends of the proprietors.

In spite, however, of the signs of public opposition, and the possibility that the fight would be cancelled, or that a scandalized mob would stop the proceedings by force, every seat was booked, and the Macgillivray had already been approached by promoters, with a view to future engagements for the giantess.

Bill herself stayed quite calm through all these excitements. Once having made up her mind that she was going to fight, and once accustomed to the more irritating features of the business, she left the rest to Providence and the Macgillivray. Her eight-inch long fingers, therefore, although it was such an important occasion, did not tremble as they drew a comb through her soft, bright hair. At that moment, although the *Evening Standard* with her article, *Why I know I shall beat Bishop Heber*, lay on the

69

dressing-table, she was not even thinking of the fight, but of whether or not she could wear the crystal necklace, which Sebastian had given her for Christmas, when she went into the ring.

"Perhaps it would be silly," she said to herself, "it might get broken, and though I'm sure he can't reach that high, he might jump, or something."

There was a knock at the door, and in came Titania.

"Are you ready for us, Bill?"

"Yes, quite ready, darling—come on, Lightfoot."

"I hope you will agree with me, miss," said Lightfoot, "... no, I'm sorry, Miss Titania, but I must do my duty and speak my mind. Miss Titania here, God bless her, wants you to wear one of your white dresses, miss, and though I know they're very becoming, I'm sure you will agree with me, that white is not at all suitable for this evening. There's nothing bridal about the occasion, and I think your gold would be much more the ticket, miss, I do, indeed!

"Now, don't you give way to him, Bill, he's becoming a perfect bully over clothes."

"I think I will wear the white, though," said Bill, "because then I can wear my necklace with it, and go garlanded to the sacrifice."

"Very well, miss, if you insist."

They mounted their step-ladders and helped her into her frock.

"Of course you're coming to the party, Lightfoot."

“Of course he is,” cried Titania. “You’ll have to hurry back after the fight and change. Can you get into it by yourself, do you think?”

70

“Thank you, miss, I expect so, and any way, I can get one of the maids to do me up at the back.”

Presently Lady Cadwallow poked her head round the door. “So tiresome of Macgillivray,” she said, as she stumbled into the room holding up her petticoat. “Here, Lightfoot, just pin this for me, will you—there’s an angel—he has just telephoned to say that we’re dining at some hotel just round the corner, in Kensington, so as to be near the Albert Hall, and because his house is in such a state getting ready for the party. Now, do hurry all of you. Bill, dear, surely you’re not going to box in that lovely dress—why, it’ll be simply ruined. Oh, I see, you’re only wearing it for dinner.”

• • • • •

The Macgillivray had intended that the personnel of this dinner party should be appositely sporting in character; but, although most of them had their seats booked by the ringside, the leading patrons had been too careful of their reputations to countenance openly any part of such highly irregular proceedings, and, taking the lead from Lord Lonsdale, had unanimously refused the Macgillivray’s invitations. And so there were a great many empty places at the long table in the hotel dining-room. The company was reduced to the family, Professor Thomas, Snowdrop, Lord Chargehead, Lord Bolus, and Mr. Kenneth, the pawnbroker.

It was a very nervous little party, and only Snowdrop, Chargehead and Bolus seemed inclined for conversation. The negro was delighted with the stories they told and rolled his eyes in astonishment. Himself no mean exaggerator, he was always

71

generously ready to believe implicitly the reminiscences of others.

“Say, yo lordship,” he said, after one unusually fantastic tale of the chase, “say, is dat really a true history bout de tiger you done tamed so’s he used to conduct de Regimental Band at Church Parade? Say, you couldn’t go tellin’ lies to a poor uneducated coloured man!”

“Of course it’s true, my dear fellow, of course it’s true. Whatever should I be telling you stories for if they weren’t true, eh?”

“Well, ah guess ah done seen some mos’ peculiar happening mahself. Ah wouldn’t be tellin’ you no lies, colonel, but ah saw a coloured man once in de jail-house at Memphis, Tennessee, who had a blue forked tongue, and we used to call him Satan on dat account. Yes, sir.”

“Reminds me,” said Lord Chargehead, “don’t know why it should, but it does, of the only time I ever saw a gorilla ... it was on the boat coming back from West Africa, and he was walking about the deck arm in arm with a German. Surprising I thought it at the time.”

“Talking of what’s surprising,” said his friend Bolus, “a very surprising thing happened the other day when I was playing golf. Man I was playing with cut a piece of turf out of the fairway and blew his nose with it.”

“Ah suppose,” ventured Snowdrop, “he done forgotten his handkerchief.”

But apart from these disconnected fragments of conversation there was a very uneasy tension throughout the meal. Lord Cadwallow was particularly nervous.

72

He was thinking of his maiden speech, and wondering if it would ever be delivered.

Neither was Mr. Kenneth any too comfortable. “Of course,” he said to Titania, “I’ve missed Mr. Sebastian seriously these last few days, he gave a lot of tone to the business, oh, a lot of tone; and if anything should go wrong to-night, I shall be only too glad for him to return. Yes, miss, I had the Cardinal sent round this morning.”

Phœbe and Atalanta shuddered delicately their white shoulders, as they thought of their children’s future trembling in the balance, and as for Malahide, he gnashed his teeth like castanets as he stuttered little prayers to himself.

“Oh, G-G-G-God, p-p-p-please make her win and 1-1-let me go on d-driving the car. Oh, G-G-God, please d-d-don’t let th-them s-stop the f-f-f-fight.”

Every one, in fact, had visions of an end being put to the giantess’s career before it had properly begun, thereby causing what would virtually be the death of the goose that was to lay the golden eggs.

At the head of the table the Macgillivray drummed his fingers and crumbled bread. His parrot (he had a distressing habit of bringing it to

dinner parties) perched unnoticed on the top of his head, sometimes making a short flight to undo the men's white ties with its beak.

Presently Lightfoot, who had been supervising the hotel service, and seeing that Bill had nothing more than a pound and a half of steak tartare and a pint of champagne, bent his head to the Macgillivray's ear.

"You are wanted on the telephone, sir," he said.

The Macgillivray turned green and left the room.

73

A minute or two later he came back, dancing and waving his arms.

"It's all right," he screeched, "the Home Secretary isn't going to stop the fight; he's had a telegram from my mother, who's his aunt, saying she'll disinherit him if he does."

"Thank God, and bless your mother!" murmured Lord Cadwallow.

• • • • •

There were queues all the way along Kensington Gore when Bill drove up to the Albert Hall. She had stayed behind with Sebastian and Malahide, while the others went on ahead to put in an official appearance at the preliminary bouts. Lightfoot and Professor Thomas were standing in front of a side door surrounded by a cordon of police.

As the giantess stepped down from the lorry and straightened herself, the crowds shouted and jostled against each other, after the manner of English people when they are confronted with something they know to be a genuine spectacle. From all quarters rose ejaculations, half sentimental, half humorous.

"Coo, isn't she pretty ... What a lovely frock! ... My, but it must be cold up there! ... Hi, I say, Miss Goliath, isn't it cold up there? ... Mind you don't bump your head against the moon ... Why, I do believe she powders her nose, just like any one else! ... Can you see if it's going to rain tomorrow?"

To these and similar inanities Bill had to listen, while the police drove back the mob, and cleared, for her, a way to the door.

"What's it like inside, Lightfoot?" she inquired.

74

"A little noisy, miss, a little noisy ... there was a good deal of hissing when his lordship and the Macgillivray sat down, and a lady, Dame Alison Tubby I think it was, stood up to protest, but it's quieter now. I've got your

things all laid out ready, miss, and there's one more preliminary fight to go."

"At any rate," thought Sebastian, as he forced himself painfully through the swarming mass to the ringside, "no one could complain that the evening was not a box-office success." Every available seat was occupied, people were being forcibly prevented from squatting in the gangways, and some bold spirits had even perched themselves among the organ pipes.

"I have always been of the opinion," said Lord Cadwallow, as he uncorked his telescope, "that, although it is quite impossible to hear anything sounding in this Albert Hall, you can, at least, see everything that happens. It would seem," he added, "that our friends and acquaintances are not over anxious to recognise us. I am tempted to suppose they are waiting to see which way the cat jumps. If this entertainment, in which my adopted daughter is the principal performer, proves to their satisfaction, no doubt we shall be accorded quite an ovation on leaving the building."

"Poor daddy, he must be desperately frightened to get as pompous as that," whispered Titania. "Oh, Sebastian, I do pray it will be all right! Don't you think you'd better go to Bill's corner when she comes in? I'm afraid she'll be horribly embarrassed, poor lamb!"

The last of the preliminary fights had just finished,

75

almost unnoticed by the audience, save for occasional spasms of patronising interest, and the crescendo of excitement and anticipation grew louder and louder throughout the Hall.

After some moments there was a noise of mingled cheers and hisses, and Heber, arm in arm with his grandmother, followed by his seconds, filed down the gangway and climbed into the ring. He was wearing over his shoulders a shabby, mouse-coloured dressing-gown, and on his face an expression of laughable ferocity. Sullenly bobbing his head, he sat down, and listened to the last-minute instructions of his grandmother.

Then came Professor Thomas, like a little ring-master in his tail coat, Snowdrop, in white trousers and-high necked jumper, and, finally, Lightfoot, very pontifical, with a lace-fringed towel over his arm.

"I told her to delay her entrance a little, sir," he whispered to Sebastian, "in order to whet their appetites, so to speak."

There was a violent stir in the audience, and several hundred people jumped to their feet in that spiteful way crowds have of trying to interfere

with each other's view at all costs; a murmur gave way to a roar, sharpened by one or two screams, and all eyes were directed at the towering figure of the giantess, as she came striding down the gangway with her fur coat thrown open to display a bright blue velvet dressing-gown underneath. After she had bowed and smiled, a little stiffly some thought, once in the direction of each corner, she reached an arm down over the ropes and taking Sebastian by the coat collar swung him lightly into the ring. It would

76

be unnecessary to remark that the crowd went mad, for all crowds are, by their very nature, mad from the beginning, but at this incident their hysterical excitement became quite dangerous in its manifestations: even old Mrs. Heber's scornful features were caught napping for a moment, and gaped open with wonder.

The referee introduced them, laying stress on the fact that the contest was privately promoted, and under the auspices of no boxing authorities on either side of the Atlantic. The opponents shook hands, and as they stood up facing each other, it was seen that the top of Heber's head was nearly up to the level of the giantess's breasts.

"Don't be afraid to hit me because I'm a woman," she said.

"I've never been afraid to hit any one yet, whether it was little children or blue-bottles," was the characteristic answer.

Professor Thomas gave Bill some last advice as he laced up the gloves. "Keep cool, miss," he whispered, "and be careful he doesn't try to butt you with 'is 'ead. That's a favourite trick of Bishop's, usin' the 'ead, and you must look out for it. Take your time, and keep 'im at a distance with the left till you get an opportunity of finishing him. Don't let him come in close."

"Anyway, you're looking magnificent!" Sebastian reassured her when she complained of nervousness.

And, indeed, she was a beautiful sight when she stood up to stretch her long, firm arms, and the rippling muscles of her stomach showed through her white silk bathing-dress. There were no flaccid rolls

77

of Brobdingnagian flesh about Bill's body. Her figure could not even be described as Juno-esque. Rather was it an enlarged replica of one of those flat-bellied Spartan wrestling girls, painted on Greek vases.

As the blue dressing-gown slipped from her shoulder, she looked down with vexed, childish eyes, and pouted her lower lip.

Then the bell rang, the seconds crept under the ropes, taking their chairs with them, and Heber advanced delicately, with soft, padding feet from his corner. A frail, wan, slip of a creature he looked in his short knickers and vermilion sash. His fourteen stone bulk, his gnarled chest covered with dark, wiry hair, his mouth curled into a snarl—what evidences were these of strength and ferocity, when compared with the towering giantess, built, so obviously, on so much larger proportions? It was as if some scraggy, stunted bramble bush were being confronted in battle by a soaring pine.

For the first three rounds Bill, paralysed with nervousness, behaved almost as if she were walking in her sleep. Once, she was almost taken by surprise when Heber made a dash to get inside her guard, but just managed to push him back to the ropes with her left. The crowd shouted encouragement to Heber, “Go on, little ’un, that’s the way—stick it, Bishop—keep outside her reach!” and “Bash her, Bishop! bash the hussy!” screamed old Mrs. Heber from her corner.

“I’m making a ridiculous exhibition of myself,” snorted Bill to Sebastian during the interval between the third and fourth rounds, “I must pull myself together.”

78

“I don’t know what’s come over you, miss,” said the Professor in an agitated tone, “you seem to be looking at the audience half the time.”

“Now, don’t you go worryin’ de poor girl,” rumbled Snowdrop. “Jes’ you go easy, Miss Bill, an’ wait till you get de opportunity. Den you lays him flat.”

But, although in the next round the giantess showed a little more enthusiasm, and chased her man round the ring, still she did not seem at her ease and failed to land a blow. Her first public appearance was obviously having a very bad effect on her boxing, for, when she led, her fist passed harmlessly over her opponent’s head, and she stood up straight as if he were a person of her own height.

“You must try your old trick, miss,” whispered the Professor, “pin him against the ropes with your left, and swing the right. Don’t be afraid to catch him a good one, he won’t be any loss.”

So when the bell went for round five, Bill sprang out of her corner and forced Heber across the ring. As he backed away she propped out her left

against his chest, and pushed him to the ropes. It may have been that she was careless, or it may have been that Heber was more agile than Snowdrop, on whom only she had practised this manœuvre, but somehow or other he managed to escape sideways, and, as he darted past her, he jumped high into the air and caught her on the angle of the jaw with his right fist—her head being then only about seven feet above the floor, as she was bending down in order to reach him.

The spectators shouted loud with excitement and laughter. Poor Bill flushed crimson and stood still

79

for a moment in the middle of the ring. For the rest of the round she was all at sea, and Heber, inflated with confidence, led her after him as he danced round the ring like a will o' the wisp.

“That’s the way, boy,” screamed his grandmother, “keep on till she’s tired—then you can jump up and bash her.”

“Never have I boxed so badly!” said Bill, dismally, after the seventh round. “Stop flapping that silly towel, Snowdrop, it’s making me blink. No, Lightfoot, I do not want my nose powdered. Really, if those grinning pygmies laugh at me again I shall lose my temper, and run amok. Curse the Macgillivray, and blast your infernal family! I hope you’ll all end in jail!”

Her lips trembled, and Sebastian saw that she was almost crying.

“Take it easy, miss, take it easy,” soothed the Professor, “you’ve still three rounds.”

It was no use, though. Bill was now in such a state of irritation that she forgot all about science, and swung her arms as if they had been the sails of a windmill in a gale. At the end of the eighth she was breathing heavily, and her face was crimson, save for a dark bruise on her forehead, where she bumped the floor after one of her wild rushes. Large pearls of sweat glistened on her upper lip, and it was obvious that she was very distressed.

The ninth round began with Heber taking the offensive. He came in under Bill’s left, and landed twice to the body, but was soon afterwards warned by the referee for butting with his head.

“I’m sure he didn’t mean to,” said Bill, and,

80

anyway, the muscles of my stomach are much too strong.”

But in the corner her seconds were quite sick with agitation, and the tears trickled down Snowdrop's cheeks.

There was a ripple of turning heads from the line of seats where the family was installed, and Sebastian felt something plucking at his coat-tails. It was Malahide.

"D-d-d-daddy s-says you're to t-t-tell B-Bill to hit him on the t-t-top of his head as if her fist were an axe."

"Like chopping wood, you know!" roared Lord Cadwallow, putting his hands to his mouth.

Sebastian held a whispered confabulation with the Professor and Snowdrop, while the round ended. As soon as the bell went and she was back in her corner, they told her Lord Cadwallow's advice.

"Don't bother to get down to him," the Professor hissed, "but 'it 'im on the top of 'is 'ead as if you was driving in a post, like. He won't be expecting that. We'll bawl out when you've got a good chance."

"All right, I'll try," answered Bill in a tired voice, "anything for peace. Give me the lipstick, please, Lightfoot, as it's the last round I may as well make up my face."

The audience was now in a ridiculous condition of hysteria, and its sympathy was clearly on the side of Heber, for it was plain that he could never seriously hurt the giantess, and he was undoubtedly battling against tremendous odds. Even his attempted foul had not alienated this sympathy, and every one considered that the difference in sizes more than made

up for the difference in sexes. It was no longer a matter of a small man trying to hit a large woman, but rather of a courageous male dwarf trying to avoid being battered to pieces by a Titaness. And forgotten now was the favourable impression which had been made in the beginning by her handsome face and well-formed limbs, her white smile and soft, bright hair. So they cheered and exhorted him with cries of, "Only one more round—keep on your feet and you'll win on points."

When the bell rang for the last round, Heber darted in to close quarters once more, and sent a right, left, to the body, then slipped back out of range. Bill seemed to be considering the situation. "Go after him!" the Professor howled. But Heber saved her the trouble by coming in again. He was confident of not being damaged, and wished to make certain of his win on points. Another harmless left flew out, and then, as his right shot

upwards for her body, Bill raised her fist and smashed it down on the top of his round cropped head.

Slowly, so slowly, indeed, that he might almost have been imitating a slow motion film, Heber dropped in a sprawling heap on the floor, and lay there, very still. Solemnly the referee counted him out. Bill bent down, picked him up in her arms, and, having ascertained, to her intense relief, that he was still breathing, carried him tenderly across the ring, and deposited him with his head in his grandmother's lap.

"I'm sorry," she said gravely, "but I had to, you know, and I hope you'll bring him to the party at Carlton House Terrace as soon as he comes round."

CHAPTER VI

“THE mistake made by hostesses and people,” the Macgillivray had expounded to Titania when they were planning the details of their evening’s entertainment, “is that they think, all the time, about whether people are enjoying themselves, and if the party is being a success. That sort of thing is no use to me, and, of course, it’s quite absurd to expect to get interesting or brilliant conversation out of any of the people we know. As I see it, the only possible excuse for giving a party at all is to get enjoyment out of it yourself. But, unfortunately, you cannot rely on your guests to provide it for you—if they are left to their own devices. Often enough, even if you ask them to come in fancy dress, they don’t look anything like sufficiently ridiculous, and, instead of quarrelling and making splendid, silly scenes, they may quite likely fall on each other’s necks and proceed to enjoy themselves. Again, if you try to whip them up into an orgy they may get sottish and roll on your furniture, or become amorous and lock you out of your bedrooms, or even leave your house altogether and go scurrying back in taxis to their own wretched hovels. How, then, can one ensure that one’s guests behave in a properly absurd manner?”

“But you’ve just been telling me it’s an impossibility,” Titania protested.

“Not at all! not at all! no such thing! no such thing! But to bring it off we have to call on all our reserves of ingenuity and energy. We must worry and badger them till they are forced to conform to our

83

idea of entertainment. Never leave them alone to amuse themselves, but make them rush about doing things which will amuse us instead. And, of course, at this party of ours we shall have to provide all sorts of absurd things for them to do.”

So, to make it easier for his guests to entertain him during the evening, which went down in social history as the fifty-thousand pound party, for that is what it was assumed to have cost by the gossip writers, the Macgillivray fitted up his house with a great many curious contrivances. Not only did these include the machinery such as circuses, swimming baths, steam organs, and so on, which, each in their turn, had been the principal features of previous entertainments given by less liberally minded

hosts, but there were also several devices which had never been seen before at similar functions. Then there were the invitations. Of these, in order to get what he called variety, the Macgillivray had sent out a great many different species. For instance, those who were well known for the pursuit of the amusing had been caught with skilfully baited hooks, such as:—“*Do come to my Zoo party and bring your pets ... Come to my Chess-with-human-pieces party and bring your children ... Come to my Darwinian party and bring your tail ... Come to my nudity party and wear as little as your figure will let you.*” The people who never missed an opportunity of appearing in fancy dress, had all been bidden to represent their favourite characters. For the intellectual snobs a menagerie of lions, to be present, had been printed on six-inch square invitation cards. The shy, retiring nobodies, who boasted that they

84

hated parties, were asked in friendly handwriting *to meet a few friends*; and those, few illustrious persons who really did have to be careful who they were seen about with, were discreetly given notice of an informal politico-diplomatic reception.

• • • • •

After the satisfactory and respectable ending of the fight, as Lord Cadwallow had predicted, the giantess and her friends had the most enthusiastic reception. “We’ll see you at the party, then,” said every one to his neighbour. Lightfoot rushed away to change, Titania and the Macgillivray shot on ahead to see that everything was in the proper disorder, Lord Cadwallow departed with his wife and daughters in a four-wheeler, while Bill was left behind with Sebastian and the remainder of her bodyguard. She had sprained her wrist in the knock-out blow on top of Hebert head, so they made her a sling out of Snowdrop’s gold coloured sash.

“I’m desperately tired,” the giantess complained, “and I dread the thought of this party. I hope you’ll look after me, Sebastian. Do you think we can find somewhere quiet where there’s room for me to sit down?”

“If it was any consolation to you, miss,” said the Professor, “I would tell you that I am feeling a little nervous, being unaccustomed to society, as you might say, and having but a poor opinion of my social superiors. Now, with Snowdrop here, it’s quite another matter. Being a negro, he’s absolutely at home at any party, and being a snob, like all his race, he’ll enjoy himself.

Why, I shouldn't be surprised if he insists on shaking hands with all the company!"

85

And, indeed, Snowdrop's eyes were revolving, and his black fingers cracking with excitement as he postured before his image in the glass, for he had changed into a bright bottle green suit, a broad striped pink shirt, a mauve tie and blue suede shoes.

"You done got no right to talk dat way, Professor," he began; "ah may be only a poor uneducated coloured man, but ah knows how to behave wid de swell white folks jus' de same as eberebody else

"All right, Snowdrop," said Bill, giving him a friendly pat on the head, "I know you do, but the Professor doesn't, and he's feeling tired and rather nervous."

None of the guests had arrived when they sneaked into Carlton House Terrace through a back door opening on to the Mall, so they explored the house. First they tried the smallest dining room and found it turned into a shooting gallery, presided over by Lord Bolus and Lord Chargehead, already quarrelling over a point of etiquette. Next they inspected a drawing-room which was being used for the Zoo, but the Macgillivray's three chimpanzees, Doctor Swift, Doctor Johnson, and Doctor Pangloss, were in possession, so they passed on to a maze of distorting mirrors, which so delighted Snowdrop that he begged to be allowed to stay, and they left him grinning at thousands of his own reflections, almost persuaded that he was back in Africa. Then they inspected the chess board, the lucky dip (which the Macgillivray had warned them not to touch, as it was filled with soot), and the Darwinian forest, furnished mainly with mud and gorse bushes, and several more rooms fitted with equally ludicrous toys.

86

At length, greatly bewildered, they found themselves in the hall where a moving staircase shared the honours with a vast steam organ. This organ had been festooned with vegetable greenery, and strapped on, all over its pipes and platforms, were chairs and music stands. Clearly the Macgillivray meant to give his musicians the peril and inconvenience of sitting on them. Ascending the staircase and passing beside the swimming bath, whose waters had been tinged by angostura to a rare, translucent pink, they came suddenly upon Lord and Lady Cadwallow, Phoebe and Atalanta, Titania and

the Macgillivray, and a very old lady wearing a poke bonnet, a black dress which jangled with ornaments, and shod in elastic-sided boots. She was sitting in a wheeled basket chair harnessed to a piebald donkey.

“Let me introduce you to my mother,” said the Macgillivray.

The old lady held up one of her grubby claws, which was decorated with a magnificent diamond ring.

“How do you do, my dear,” she said, “how do you do. I’m so glad you won.”

“It was thanks to you that the fight ever took place,” Bill replied.

“Not a bit of it, my dear. Besides, I’m always having to threaten the Home Secretary with disinheritance to get Macgillivray here out of the consequences of his monkey-tricks, though I’m sure I don’t know how we shall manage when the other Government gets in. I wish I had been able to see you box, but I only got down from Scotland yesterday, you know, after a very tiresome three weeks’ journey in my donkey carriage, and my doctor

87

wouldn’t allow me to go. I get so over-excited at boxing matches, you see.”

“Well, anyway,” said Lady Cadwallow, “we’re delighted to see you, Mrs. Macgillivray.”

“Not so much of the Mrs. Macgillivray, if you please, Lady Cadwallow, I have just as much right to be called *the Macgillivray* as my son here.”

“Oh, no, you haven’t, Mummy—you know perfectly well that the prefix ‘the’ only passes through the male line.”

“Nonsense, child! If you were anything but illiterate, you would know that James the first began it with our ancestor Androgynus Macgillivray, whose sex was so indeterminate that he always referred to him as simply ‘*the Macgillivray*.’ And ever since, it has been the privilege of all members of our family, of every sex, to call themselves ‘the.’ ”

“This has always been one of her favourite bones of contention,” said the Macgillivray to the company at large.

“Your advice was marvellous,” Bill told Lord Cadwallow. “I should never have knocked him out, if you hadn’t thought of that. What a clever old gentleman you are!”

“Thank you, my dear, thank you! Yes, I flatter myself it was shrewd. I said to Malahide, when he told me what was happening, for of course I couldn’t see very clearly, you know, ‘It’s very simple,’ I said, ‘she must pretend that he’s a nail and she’s a hammer.’ ” He turned his head towards

his wife. "No, my dear, it's no use your pretending—you did not come to the same conclusion yourself until some

88

minutes afterwards. Your mother, Sebastian, is sulky this evening, very sulky, I consider."

But Lady Cadwallow's retort was interrupted by the Macgillivray.

"Come on, we must go downstairs," he said, "they're beginning to arrive. Bill, would you mind helping to get Mummy's donkey down the staircase? Thank you."

• • • • •

By the time that the female Macgillivray's donkey-drawn chair had successfully negotiated the moving staircase, some three hundred persons were already assembled in the hall, shifting uneasily from one foot to the other, as the influx of new arrivals pushed them forward.

Then it was seen that the terms of the various invitations had been faithfully carried out. Some in full evening dress wore decorations on the lapels of their coats, and stars on their bosoms, some in hairy tweeds were carrying gun cases. Another multitude wore bathing dresses. Of those in fancy dress, quite a large number represented apes, and playfully flicked their tails in each other's faces, while the remainder (with the exception of those who abided by the old Wardour Street traditions of period costume, and the young men who wore satin sailor jumpers, and black tarpaulin trousers) were decked out in patterns of such household materials as calico, celluloid, mica, sackcloth, and drugget, ornamented in some cases by headdresses of wire gauze, or perhaps a necklace of match-boxes strung on a bicycle chain. Jostling in amongst this throng, biting, scratching, tripping and kicking their way

89

through to the foot of the staircase, came the sixteen dear little children who had been brought to act as pawns in the game of human chess.

The Macgillivray grinned and twitched all over as he surveyed the endless possibilities of glorious confusion. For a moment he was tempted to precipitate an immediate crisis, but he controlled himself with an effort and, taking the megaphone, which was handed him by a servant, he bellowed through it instructions as to the organisation of his guests.

“Will those who are going to be chessmen, please take the children and go in there on the left, my mother and Lord Cadwallow are going to play and they will be along in a minute. The Zoo is through the door on the right and every room has a notice to say what is inside. The swimming bath is upstairs, so is supper, and so are the only habitable rooms in the house.”

It was nearly half an hour before the party got under way and dancing started to the steam organ, reinforced by a band whose members had been compelled to arrange themselves on their dangerously unsteady perches amongst the foliage.

“It’s all right, Macgillivray,” said Titania, “don’t worry so, the confusion is bound to follow. Come on, now, and we’ll take Bill round and introduce her, then we can start making proper nuisances of ourselves.”

So once more the giantess was made to wander vaguely through that crazy house, which apparently was full of lunatics. The Macgillivray plucked her forward by her sling, as with her free hand she kept a firm hold on Sebastian. Sometimes, even, where the crowd was thickest, it was necessary to lift him up on

90

her shoulder, for fear that he should get damaged by the swarm of friends and acquaintances who surged around them, crying, “Come with us, Sebastian, darling, and show us the way about this filthy party.”

Bill was given a most enthusiastic reception, and they congratulated her incessantly. For every one she had a gentle smile, and sometimes a pat on the head if they stared up at her longer than was strictly in accordance with good manners. Only a few were really frightened when she bent down to shake their hands, but, generally, she was a huge success, and soon a band of admirers of all sexes was following after her from room to room.

At length, weary with introductions, congratulations, and the horde of invitations which were showered upon her, she turned to the Macgillivray.

“I can bear it no longer!” she said. “I warned you, Macgillivray, that I wasn’t going to work very hard at this party, didn’t I? Well, I’ve had enough. I’ve sprained my wrist, I’ve bruised my forehead, and I’ve shaken hands with heaven only knows how many people for you this evening already. I’ve been asked to so many parties that I’ve got all the dates mixed, and I won’t be able to go to any. And now Sebastian and I are going to find a quiet corner upstairs where we can eat and drink in peace. Let us know when something too absurd happens and we’ll come down and watch.”

“And so you shall, Bill,” the Macgillivray answered kindly, “so you shall. You’ve been a very good girl to-night, indeed you have. Come along now, Titania, and we’ll get into some mischief.”

And with that Bill kissed them both tenderly on

91

their foreheads and they were whisked away by the moving staircase to the pandemonium below.

• • • • •

“I wonder,” said Titania, as they got off at the bottom, “what has become of Lightfoot. I haven’t seen Mr. Kenneth either yet, or Snowdrop, or Black Michael, or Wanda, or the Duke of Cumberland, or any of them.”

“We shall find them all right,” he reassured her, feeling quite positive himself that there were going to be no barnacles in the caviare of that evening, “they’re up to some nonsense or other, no doubt. Now let’s go and look at the chess.”

They found the female Macgillivray and Lord Cadwallow with megaphones in their hands, seated on tennis umpiring chairs, and glaring at each other across the chess-board. The piebald donkey was tethered by a curtain rope. The human pieces were distinguishable from one another by black or white robes, and head dresses mitred, crowned, or machicolated according to their rank, while the heads of the knights were encased in cardboard horse-masks. Apparently the game had only just begun, for all the pawns, those sixteen dear little children, were still on the board.

Mrs. Macgillivray looked down from her chair—she was playing black. “I have been forced to decline Lord Cadwallow’s queen’s gambit,” she said, “as when I told his queen’s bishop’s pawn that my queen’s pawn had taken him, the little beast hacked my piece on the shins, and refused to go off the board, so I had to do something else instead. What have you done now, Lord Cadwallow?”

92

“Eh?”

“I said, ‘What have you moved, you old fool?’ ”

“Oh ... ah ... old fool yourself, yes, well, I have just ordered bishop to queen’s three,” he bawled back at her through the megaphone.

“I don’t want to move,” said the bishop, who was personated by some obscure young man or other, “I’m talking to Charles, the knight, here, on

the next square—and you can jolly well wait until we’ve finished our conversation; move something else for the present.”

“But you must move when you’re told,” shouted Lord Cadwallow and Mrs. Macgillivray, simultaneously, “you’re only pieces and you have to do what we tell you.”

“No!” shouted several of the pieces, “we’ll move later on—let the children have their turn first, we’ll move when you’ve got them off the board.”

Titania and the Macgillivray looked on from the background, as there seemed promise of good entertainment.

To make the pawns move was only too easy, but it was quite another matter to get them on their proper squares. They ran shouting and squabbling over the board, while, from the back file, their parents cried encouragement.

“That’s the way, Hamish,” yelled old Lady Mole, the white queen, as her small son stoutly resisted a perfectly legitimate attempt by another pawn to sweep him off the board.

“That’s the way ... fight him ... don’t let him take you, it’s all part of the game,” she added.

93

“It’s no such thing, you stupid old crone,” screamed Mrs. Macgillivray, standing up on her chair, “get off the board, I tell you, you filthy, dirty, little brat, or I’ll have you sent home to bed at once.”

When, at last, the grown-ups were persuaded to leave the back file, the game took on a new character. In the first place, the few remaining pawns took every opportunity of hacking their elders on the shins, repeating, with every kick, Lady Mole’s dictum that it was all part of the game. Finally, when his little nephew persisted in not being taken, Sir Adolf Warren, one of the black knights, caught the child by his collar, and, dragging him off the board, administered a severe thrashing with the flat of his hand. But far greater bitterness was caused when pieces had to be taken by those whom they considered their social inferiors.

“I refuse to give place to that wretched plumber’s wife,” hissed the Duchess of Ataxia, one of the white rooks, when she was exchanged by Lord Cadwallow for Lady Lambeth, a black bishop.

“I castle, Lord Cadwallow, I castle on the king’s side,” said Mrs. Macgillivray, when this difference had been adjusted. But the black king,

old Lord Speeke-and-Sloane, was fast asleep on his shooting stick.

“Good God!” he complained, when they woke him up and his attendant rook, Rudolph Odo, the financier, moved round beside him. “You’re not going to make me stand next to this blackguard, are you? Why he’ll pick my pocket, or something!”

Not until the dispute was settled between the

94

rival queens, Lady Mole, and Princess Ventre-Bleu, who had actually come to blows in the middle of the board, did Titania and the Macgillivray tear themselves away in search of further entertainment.

• • • • •

By this time the house was in a rare state of disturbance, and as they strolled, arm in arm, on their tour of inspection, in every room the most curiously assorted variety of voices assailed their ears. Some were deep and rumbling, others whining nasally, while the majority rose to a high-pitched screech of excitement. Frequently the bark of a dog, or the grunt of an ape, from the zoo room, cut sharp through the general hum. It was not possible to hear much of the details of any conversation, but the two friends were able to trap many a disjointed snatch of chatter when the speaker’s voices rose to an unbelievable pitch.

“My dear, his hands were too horrible—just like bath chaps, you know.”

“Of course I live for myself.”

“Darling, did you see them upstairs? Never have I seen such behaviour!”

“But then, he is an arch-cad, what else can you expect?”

“How drunk are you now, my sweet?”

“Not enough to dance with you, yet.”

“But you’re coming back with me afterwards!”

“Not without an anæsthetic, I’m not!”

“Her mother, of course, was one of the Leicestershire Drabs, so no wonder.”

“God, that duchess has fallen down again. The old beast must be absolutely stinkin’ drunk!”

95

In the hall the band and steam organ were jerking out the contorted rhythms of “Shake that Thing” and people were dancing. They caught sight of Lady Cadwallow awlirl in the arms of Snowdrop. The negro was

chanting as he danced ... they heard his deep rolling voice, "Old Uncle Jack, de jelly roll king, got a hump in his back from shaking that thing, but he still keeps shaking that thi-i-i-i-ing ..." Clearly he was aware of what a distinguished figure he was cutting, as compared with the poor white trash, who tried in vain to imitate the expert manner in which he strutted and swayed his hips.

Already his guests were beginning to discover that the Macgillivray's toys were nothing like so amusing as they had imagined at the beginning. Several had lost their tempers with the maze of mirrors, as was evident by some ugly bruises on their foreheads, and one or two rainbow coloured eyes. The clothes of others were filled with gorse-prickles, their shoes coated with mud, and many a fancy dress was woefully bedraggled, cracked or splintered, according to its composition. The party was rapidly becoming rougher and rougher. There were too many people, even if they had been sober, for the space available, and now that quite half the party were drunk and, therefore, required, as the drunk always do, four times the room they took up when sober, the crush was almost intolerable. Moreover, the moving staircase, cunningly manipulated by Malahide, had developed a bad habit of going much too fast, and many a one was shot off to sustain a nasty fall as he reached the top or bottom.

Neither were things going too smoothly in the zoo

96

room when Titania and the Macgillivray looked in to see what was happening. Every one, heedless of the yelps, whistles, hisses and splashing of their own particular pets, was packed together in a ring, round a large cage at the far end of the room, laughing, with one exception, as if their sides would burst. The cause of the disturbance was the three chimpanzees. They had managed to catch Mrs. Hellebore's little Manchester terrier by the tail and drag him through the bars of the cage. Two of them, with expressions of quite maternal solicitude on their wrinkled faces, were now engaged in plucking every hair from his body, while the third stood close at hand and submitted the unfortunate animal to some of those indignities which a civilian population has to undergo from the rank and file of an invading army in time of war.

"If it were only one of my children it wouldn't matter so much," wailed his mistress, "but little Ariel, poor darling, and always so vain of his appearance. And yet," she consoled herself, "I shall be the only woman in

London to have a naked dog. There now, they've finished at last, and nothing left but a few hairs on the end of his tail." She dried her tears and went on jabbering away. "Why, I declare he looks quite smart already! Now if I could only get some one to paint some frescoes on his back..."

In another corner of the room the Lady Mary Stedfast was helping her twin sister Jane to try on round her plump wriggling shoulders the fashionably tubular form of a boa-constrictor.

"The way he squeezes," she cooed, "is too delicious!"

97

"Haven't you got a pet to play with?" Titania inquired gently, as if she were addressing a little child, of Mrs. Reachey, a lady whose eccentricity was remarkable even in that company.

"Yes, thank you, my dear, I've brought my own, you see."

"But where are they?"

"They're here," she pointed to her bag which Titania noticed was large and almost spherical.

"You see," the old lady went on, "it's lined with waterproof, and I take them about wherever I go."

She opened the bag, and Titania saw that it contained a pair of Japanese goldfish, swimming placidly and unperturbed by all the clamour of the outer world.

• • • • •

"Here they are at last," cried the Macgillivray, as they looked through the door of the celebrities room upstairs.

"Gosh!" whispered Titania, "don't give them away, the *darlings*, they're a terrific success, how sweet of them to think of bringing *him*."

The "darlings" were Lightfoot and Mr. Kenneth, and "him" was the clockwork figure of Cardinal Manning. His Eminence had just been wound up by the little pawnbroker and was now solemnly pointing a jerky forefinger at the assembly, while at the same time he emitted one of those celebrated dry sniffs, which so often paralysed with terror the Catholic dignitaries of a bygone age.

"Altogether too lifelike," said Lady Stroat, who was willing to remember that far back, "why, I believe it really is the Cardinal—that was just the

98

way he sniffed when he married my mother at the oratory. And if it is I shall ask him to lunch to-morrow, it would certainly deceive a great many people I know.”

Scarce daring to breathe, they watched while the sniffs died away, and the pointing forefinger was still.

Lightfoot was plainly representing Bernard Shaw, wearing a Norfolk jacket and cycling breeches. His beard had been docked of two and a half feet of its snowy cascade, the remaining bush having been dyed to the well-known ginger hue. But the dye had been carelessly applied and the general effect was tawny orange like the fur of an orang-outang.

“I’m very sorry, miss,” he murmured in Titania’s ear, “but the Queen Victoria dress was impossibly tight, I don’t know what can have happened, it was all right before those alterations were made. So Kenneth, bless his clever little head, suggested I should come as Mr. Shaw, and I borrowed an old coat and pair of breeches of his lordship’s. But the funny part, and would you believe it, miss, but it’s true, so help me, is that a lot of them think I really am Mr. Shaw, they do indeed. You’ve no idea how many invitations I have received in spite of the bungling job we made of the beard and all. It’s too ludicrous, it really is, miss.”

For the Macgillivray had provided a whole team of lions for his party. Some were genuine celebrities; a few, like Lightfoot, were spurious, and some were rare exotics, of value on account of their uniqueness alone, and not for any qualities of achievement.

And in and out among the noble animals ranged those two famous huntresses, Lady Otolith, and Mrs.

99

Bogus, ever jealous, but rivals who had been known, on occasion, to combine forces in order to prevent any newcomer to the jungle from poaching their preserves.

“Good hunting?” queried the Macgillivray, as they came over to congratulate him on the party.

“My dear Macgillivray,” Lady Otolith nasally intoned, “why ever have you let your giantess hide herself like this? I haven’t had half a chance to talk to her, and such a delightful creature, too, I thought. Do see that she remembers to come to my lunch on Friday.”

“Yes, indeed,” Mrs. Bogus chimed in. “I went up to look for her just now, and a very rude little creature, young Comet I think it must have been,

told me to go away. ‘She’s not to be shot at,’ he squeaked, ‘she’s preserved game this evening.’ Now, what can he have meant by that, I wonder?”

“Never mind, never mind!” said the Macgillivray. “Come along with me, both of you, and I’ll introduce you to somebody who really is important.” He took the two ladies, one by each arm, and led them to a dim corner of the room.

“Let me introduce the public executioner ...” he said.

The man who rose from his chair and bowed politely over their hands, had none of the characteristics which have been attributed to other members of his craft by writers of fiction. That is to say, he was not a savage Dickensian blackguard, or a cold-eyed foxy grocer’s assistant, and still less was he a shy, kindly, elfin, whimsical-Barrie little creature. This executioner was tall and wore a well-fitting

100

tail coat. He had a lean, hawk-like countenance, which would have suited a first secretary of an embassy, and his manners were glossily correct like those of a shop-walker.

“Pleased to meet you, ladies,” he said, “Framlingham the name is, in case you didn’t catch it. Nice little show, this, isn’t it? Very different from my breakfast party in the morning.”

“What are you doing for breakfast?” asked Lady Otolith.

“Oh, just a little ceremony I have to attend at Pentonville, you know. Hawkins and Naylor, the two clergymen murderers from Earl’s Court. You’ve read the case, I expect. Very curious it seems to have been. Hawkins was the vicar and Naylor his curate. They did in the whole of the choir at St. Ptolemy’s, Warwick Row. The most extraordinary pair I ever set eyes on in all my experience. Why, I wouldn’t miss tomorrow’s breakfast for anything, that I wouldn’t. They’re not very fond of each other, it seems. Remember what Naylor said in the dock? He said, ‘I don’t care what happens to me so long as Crazy Jane gets his’—Crazy Jane was his pet name for Hawkins; nice name for a curate to call his vicar, isn’t it? —‘Don’t you let him kid you into thinking he’s dotty and send him to Broadmoor, I know he acts that way, but that’s only his cunning foxing, that is.’ Oh, yes, I went to try on the collars this afternoon, and to-morrow morning, at eight a.m. to the tick, up they go, or, rather, down.”

“Are they likely to give you any trouble, do you think?” inquired Mrs. Bogus.

“Naylor won’t, but Hawkins may. He’s a

101

restless old devil, and never keeps still for a moment. I shall work him off first, of course.”

“But, surely, I thought it was always over so quickly ...?”

“Oh, bless you, no, m’lady—that’s only what you read in the papers. When it says the sentence was carried out in thirty seconds, that’s not true, you know, not by any means. Why, often enough, they have to be dragged, kicking and struggling, to the scaffold. That Kirkwood, you know, the Sheffield man, who cut his wife’s throat with a tooth glass, why, it took me half an hour to get him to toe the line. My word, he was in a temper. See that!”—he pointed to an angry red line which ran from his collar up under his chin—“He did that with his nails when I was trying to pinion him.”

All this time the two ladies had been watching each other to see that neither got her invitation in first, but at length Lady Otolith could stand the strain no longer.

“I think, dear,” she said, “we had better have a compromise. After all, we have both discovered him simultaneously, so let us give a party for him together at my house.”

“Together, if you like,” said Mrs. Bogus, “but not at your house. Not if I know it! Why, you’d lock me in the lavatory or something, and pretend I was ill. No, we’ll give it at a hotel and have fair play for both of us. Could you lunch with us one day next week, Mr. Framlingham?”

“Any day you choose, ladies, I shall be delighted. Our host gave me to understand you might be likely to require some such little service. Oh, yes, I shall be

102

delighted, but there is just one condition—if you wouldn’t mind not asking the Home Secretary, he doesn’t approve of that sort of thing, you see, and he’s my Guvnor in a manner of speaking!”

• • • • •

Talking together at the head of the stairs, when Titania and the Macgillivray came out of the lions’ den, were Lady Cadwallow and old Mrs. Heber. Bishop was standing respectfully beside them drinking champagne from a bottle. He was, it seemed, more than a little drunk.

“My good woman,” Lady Cadwallow was roaring, “how many more times have I got to tell you that Miss Harkaway is not my daughter. I do not know what she was accustomed to eat as a child, and curse me if I care. Of course. I’m very fond of the girl, but for her sake I thank God she was not born my daughter. The cost of feeding her is, I can assure you, terrific. If we had had the charge of her from birth she would have perished of starvation long ago.”

“I asseverate my opinion,” said Mrs. Heber, firmly, but without any apparent relevance. “The blow was a foul, and I ought to know something about fousls considering how many times poor Bishop has been disqualified.”

“Nonsense, old woman, nonsense, it was above the collar not below the belt. You didn’t think it was a foul, Mr. Heber, did you now?”

“Take that bottle out of your mouth when her ladyship speaks to you,” barked his grandmother.

“Foul be damned!” said Bishop, “don’t you listen to Granny, she’s always objecting, she is, the old bully. I tried a foul, if you like, with me ’ead.

103

but it didn’t have no more effect than if it had been an air balloon. She’s a holy terror, that girl of yours is, m’lady. ’Course, any one could see she wasn’t up to form this evening, but it didn’t make no difference, I couldn’t reach anywhere near her. If she wasn’t so kind, and smiling at you, and all, I should say she was positively inhuman, I would.”

“Have you been up to the swimming bath yet, Macgillivray?” inquired Lady Cadwallow. “You really ought to, you know, the conduct is quite inconceivable, and they’re wasting all that beautiful red water.”

“We’re just going, mummy,” said Titania, “we’ve been giving it time to fill up. Come on, Macgillivray.”

At every party there is always one room, or corner of a room, where the most outrageously behaved people congregate together. And such, at this party, was the fate of the swimming bath. When Titania and the Macgillivray arrived on the scene, it was swarming with life as if it were a pool of sacred crocodiles, an illusion which was heightened by the presence of the boa-constrictor, who swam backwards and forwards amongst the writhing, splashing bodies, sometimes lashing out at them, in terror, with his tail. Not only the bathing dress brigade were in the bath. Witty practical

jokers, such as Black Michael and the Duke of Cumberland had a glorious time pushing in every one they could lay their hands on, and they were, even now, engaged in ducking the Rajah of Jafpas who had come dressed by Clarkson as a mediæval page. The poor little urchin wailed dismally as they held him over the water, but it was of no avail.

104

“Down he goes, the little ruffian,” exclaimed the young man who was nicknamed the Duke of Cumberland, and, “Push his head under when he comes up again,” boomed Black Michael. “We’ll teach him not to ask us to his parties, we’ll teach him.”

Wanda Samson caught sight of the Macgillivray, and came stumbling across to the door. She had taken off her skirt and was wearing a pair of tartan drawers.

“They want me to bathe,” she cried, “but I can’t, not in that stuff, at least. No, I don’t mind the colour, it’s the water I complain of. What have you put in it anyway?”

“Angostura, I think it is,” the Macgillivray told her.

“Well, why not add some gin, fool, why not add some gin, then it would be pink gin. Gracious me, if I’d only known that before. Why, I thought it was Condyl’s fluid, or something!”

“By all means let there be gin, by all means!” said the Macgillivray. He felt now that this section of his party, at any rate, was coming well up to scratch, and, accordingly, he yelled to his servants. “Hi, there, hi! Bring all the bottles of gin you can find in the house, and pour them into the bath. Hurry, now, quick!”

The servants came back in such a short time that one might have thought they had been expecting this very order all the evening. They formed a chain, as if they were handling buckets at a village fire, and bottle after bottle was passed along to be emptied into the bath. It was, indeed, one of those occasions when every one is described as working with a will.

105

“Is that all the gin you’ve got in the house?” queried Wanda, when the last bottle had been removed, and the water became several shades lighter.

“All, indeed! You old horror! Isn’t she a filthy glutton, Titania? You won’t drink that dry in a hurry.”

“What are you going to do about a bathing dress, Wanda?” Titania asked.

“Oh, I don’t bother about that sort of thing,” was the answer, and, with a hitch at her tartan drawers, and a none too friendly push from some one immediately behind her, Miss Samson took a smacking belly-flop into the bath.

The slender young things splashed and squealed and wriggled their shoulders; the gross old objects, (for it was not, by any means, with youth only that the bath was filled) bobbed up and down, banging against each other, the poor boa constrictor thrashed about regardless, and the crowd at the sides held their breath while Miss Samson lay, arms outstretched, upon the surface of the water. Would she never lift her head?

“I believe the level is sinking already,” shouted Black Michael.

At last the old lady rolled over on her back.

“Woof!” she spluttered, “you’ve made it jolly strong, Macgillivray.”

Immediately there was a rush for the bath. Those who could find no room to jump, lay down and lapped at the mixture as it overflowed the edges. Forgotten, in the attraction of this novel way of drinking, was the superfluity of champagne and every other costly liquor with which the house was so amply provided.

106

“I’ll say it reminds me,” began a familiar voice behind, “ob de revivalist meetings way back in Memphis, Tennessee. Ah done had mahself totally immersed jes’ lak dese folks am doin’, ah did, yes sir. Parson Brown, he done said it was no damn good ’less you was under de watter foh five minutes by de stop watch.”

Snowdrop’s statement was received with guffaws of derision by three of his countrymen, whose immaculate tail coats and white ties labelled them “theatricals.”

“Fancy that, now!” minced one of them, in accents which any reporter would have classed as Oxford. “Fancy that, now. Say, is not that just typical of a poor uneducated coloured man? I suppose you’re a boxer, my friend?”

“Say, not so much of that coloured talk. What colour are you dis ebenin’? Gee, if you wasn’t so black already, ah might be gibbin’ you a black eye. Habben’t ah just done gone dancin’ with a real titled lady?”

“That’s right, Snowdrop,” Titania encouraged him, “don’t you let them get upstage with you. They’re only piano players, anyway.”

“Sure, I won’t, Miss Titania,” and, thus exhorted, Snowdrop proceeded to clasp all three of them in his arms, and trundle them into the bath.

The scene was now so indescribable that the Macgillivray thought it only fair that Bill should be fetched. “Not,” as he explained to Titania, “to make further sport for us, but simply to see the fun.”

And presently the giantess came in, rubbing her eyes with her uninjured hand.

107

“What’s happening?” Sebastian asked, “we were so comfortable sleeping.”

“Oh, we thought you oughtn’t to miss this disgusting spectacle.”

“Disgusting, I should think so!” Bill sniffed. “Look at Wanda, she’ll get pneumonia, bathing in her clothes. Stand still a minute, can’t you, Macgillivray? You’re jigging about all over the place. I don’t see anything to get so excited about. Only a lot of drunken swine behaving disgracefully. What have they got in the bath?”

“Oh, just gin and angostura.”

“Humph! I should think it was about time you put a stop to this party. Do you know what the time is? No, well, it’s three o’clock, and you’ve forgotten all about the New Year.”

“Good God, why, so we have!” Titania exclaimed, “whatever shall we do, Macgillivray?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know, get them downstairs, I should think. All right, Bill, we’ll soon clear them out of the house. Just you wait and see.” He started bawling, “Now then, everybody, out you get, and come downstairs. Come on, come on, come on, you must be tired of pink gin. Come and see the New Year in downstairs. It came in three hours ago, but that doesn’t matter.”

From this point onwards, until she found herself wearily eating bacon and eggs in the kitchen of Cadwallow House, Bill was never afterwards able to remember the exact sequence of events, chiefly, as she confessed to Sebastian, because everything seemed to be happening at once.

Certainly, there was a lot more riotous behaviour

108

before the Macgillivray, with the help of his servants, who acted as sheep-dogs, managed to collect the greater part of his guests in the hall and

adjoining rooms. And a very angry collection they made. He remarked with glee that there was scarcely any one who looked as if they had enjoyed themselves. Tattered frocks, crumpled shirt fronts, bedraggled fancy dresses, bruised faces, lame legs; for him, all these were a testimony to the success of his party. One or two fights, even, were beginning amongst the younger men, and a hostile crowd was gathered round Lord Bolus, whose carelessness was held responsible for a slight accident in the shooting gallery. But what gave the Macgillivray his supreme pleasure, was the number of furious faces.

“At any rate,” he told Titania, “even though you may call it a silly party, I’ll guarantee no one’s enjoyed it; except Wanda, of course.”

“I can’t think why they’ve stayed so long,” she answered, “I’ve never seen people look so miserable.”

For the climax of the evening, it had been arranged that a fire balloon, with a fabric of Union Jacks, bearing in its car a wax model of Mrs. Stanley Baldwin, was to descend through the well of the house; and this event was to be followed by a grand discharge of fireworks, the singing of “Auld Lang Syne” and other apposite demonstrations. When the hall and staircase were overflowing, the Macgillivray gave the signal. Everybody craned their necks upwards to watch the fiery portent, and the band struck up. Then came the disasters, and to give the Macgillivray his due, let it be known that

109

their origin was presumably spontaneous, for not even to Titania would he confess any responsibility for what happened.

Suddenly, without warning, the moving staircase started working with a jerk, and continued to rumble, with increasing speed, in the downward direction. Those who were standing on it, were thrown violently forward on top of the people in the hall, who, for their part, thinking it was a plot to put them to further inconvenience, promptly lost their tempers and offered a stout resistance. The next moment water came splashing down the stairs, at first in small puddles, then in pink cascades, and finally in a rushing torrent, whose odour left no doubt as to its source. Bill, who was wisely standing near the door, hoisted Sebastian on her shoulders, and braced her body to meet the flood. “Come on,” she said, “the swimming bath has burst—we’ll get out through the kitchen.”

Fortunately the doors were wide, and the first rush of people was able to make its escape without doing much damage to itself. Moreover, the torrent of pink gin took the best direction, with the result that, in two minutes, every one had floundered over the doorstep and out into Carlton House Terrace. With them went Mrs. Reachey's gold-fish, washed out of their bag (they got as far as the Duke of York's column, there to draw a last intoxicated breath) and the boa-constrictor. The latter was found asleep next morning, to the utter dismay and confusion of the Office of Works, coiled up on the green lawn at the back of the Foreign Office.

• • • • •

110

One by one the family splashed their way back into the house, cursing as their feet got entangled in other people's discarded clothing, and as they banged against the upturned furniture. The Macgillivray, rapt in a spiritual ecstasy, was standing gazing round him at the wreckage. The water, covering his feet, lapped at the bottoms of his trousers. "*Nunc Dimittis*," he was murmuring to himself.

Titania shook him by the arm. "You had better come back with us," she said. "I'm sure this house isn't fit to sleep in."

Lady Cadwallow pointed to the organ. "What's that?" she gasped. "Don't say it's a drowned corpse."

A very old pair of shoes, with legs attached, was protruding from one of the recesses of the organ. Bill took hold and pulled. Out came the dripping form of Wanda Samson. "Leave me alone, can't you," she growled, "can't I go to sleep in the gutter without the police interfering." She opened her eyes. "Oh, it's you, is it?"

"You may say what you like, Mrs. Macgillivray," Lord Cadwallow was arguing, "the game was strongly in my favour when we left off."

"Fiddle de dee, Lord Cadwallow, why, I had you mate on the move."

But they were interrupted by the splashing of heavy boots. A dark blue figure appeared and a deep voice said, "Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, but which of you is the Macgillivray of Ballas?"

"I am; what's happened?"

"What's happened, indeed!" snorted the policeman. "Ho, ho, what's happened! Why, three

111

chimpanzees have broken into the Athenæum Club across the way, an' are misconductin' themselves something shameful, a' tearin' of the place to pieces. The porter said he saw them comin' out of the house, and when they walked up the Club steps, arm in arm, he thought they was members or foreign professors or something, because, of course, they was chattering to each other in double dutch. As soon as he opened the door he saw his mistake, but it was too late then; they jumped on him. You'd better come across at once, sir, and see if you can do anything, or they'll have the Club destroyed entirely."

CHAPTER VII

ON the morning after the party, the Macgillivray's circus, as the newspapers started calling them, left London for the Dorset coast. There, in the Macgillivray's house, overlooking the leaden, wintry sea, they passed a quiet week-end, recovering from the severe colds which they had caught from the drenching of the previous night. Phœbe and Atalanta, who had left before the bursting of the swimming bath, alone escaped the disease—a circumstance which somewhat irritated the rest of their family until Lord Cadwallow gave his opinion that they were quite certain to fall for it in a day or two. Physically, therefore, it was an uncomfortable weekend, punctuated by continual snuffling, and coughing and sneezing. And Bill suffered most of all.

"I believe," she interjected at dinner, between trumpet blasts upon a blue silk pocket handkerchief,

112

large enough to have made a shirt for Sebastian, "I believe this is the first cold I've had in my life. I suppose it must be the effect of living indoors ..."

"My fault entirely, my dear," apologised her host, "a little more gin in the bath and we should have kept the cold out. But once start splashing water about the place and illness is sure to follow. Sir Philip Sidney knew what he was doing all right."

"I still don't believe you about the flood, Macgillivray," said Sebastian. "Has he confessed to you, Titania?"

"Not yet, he hasn't, but I'm so convinced he arranged it beforehand, that I've scarcely even bothered to ask him. So exactly the sort of trick Macgillivray would play I—trying to drown his guests I but I think he might have told *us* about it, so that we could have some warning."

"I thought it very suspicious, myself, that, and the staircase going mad at the same time," said Lady Cadwallow from her end of the table. "I think you might, anyway, have told *me* about that, Macgillivray. I was standing with poor old Mrs. Heber right at the top, and the point of her elbow went almost through my back."

The Macgillivray gazed down at his plate, and seemed a trifle embarrassed.

"I can assure you all," he said, "I had nothing whatever to do with those accidents. If I had known they were going to happen, of course I should have warned you. And didn't I get soaked like any one else? Still, if you won't believe me, that's all about it."

"Of course we don't believe you, Macgillivray,"

113

said Titania, raising her voice a little. "Everybody knows that you are obsessed with a passion for being destructive. Why, you'd put yourself to any sort of inconvenience in order to make a disturbance. I wonder you haven't been shut up long ago. As for not warning us, that was sheer devilishness; you knew you were going to suffer, so you thought we might as well too."

"You do rather remind me, Macgillivray," interrupted Bill, before he had time to answer these charges, "of the lunatic who escaped, and was had up for travelling without a ticket. I saw it in the papers the other day. He got up in the court, and said he wished to make a statement, and the judge asked why he wanted to do that, so he smiled sweetly, and said, 'Oh, simply in order to add to the general confusion.' "

"Yes, that's Macgillivray all over," chipped in Sebastian. "I expect, when he was a little boy he used to swallow safety-pins, just for a lark, really hoping that it would terrify his nurse."

"D-d-don't! you th-think," stammered Malahide, "it w-was a little unwise to g-g-give quite s-s-such a violent p-p-party? I m-m-mean, won't it m-make us r-rather too unpopular?"

With such questions of general policy the Macgillivray felt himself on safer ground, and resumed his aggressive double-barrelled manner of speaking.

"Nonsense, nonsense, Malahide. Why should it? Why should it? And what if it does? What if it does? They'll come to see Bill box just the same, won't they? That's all we're concerned with, isn't it? Besides, I'm always unpopular, and no wonder,

114

indeed, no wonder. And yet people go on coming to my parties whenever I give one. They'd come to another this evening if I asked them. I'm too rich

to be really unpopular, Malahide; much too rich, I tell you.”

They stayed indoors that week-end. The house, unlike Carlton House Terrace, which, even when there was no party, had an air of restrained excitement, as if at any moment something alarming and unexpected was rather more than likely to happen, as if indeed it were one gigantic booby trap, was surprisingly restful. The exterior alone was at all in keeping with its master's eccentricity. It had been built at the close of the eighteenth century for a successful Nabob, returned from India, who, seemingly infatuated with all things Oriental, had insisted on the Muslim style of architecture. But a cunning architect had cheated him out of the fullest realisation of his dreams, by planning high, spacious rooms, with tall, wide windows, and had executed his compromise in soft yellow stone. The general effect, therefore, in spite of a dome, two minarets, and various castellations about the roof, to say nothing of a water-garden, including a shrine for some irrelevant Brahmin deity, was nothing like so crazy as its original owner had intended. Nevertheless, in the summer, it afforded a fine source of wonder and speculation for passengers on board the pleasure steamers to and from Bournemouth, who could scarcely have been expecting to see a mock oriental palace on the shores of the English Channel.

“I have five houses in various parts of this filthy little country,” the Macgillivray explained, when he

115

showed Bill over it, “and this is the only one I am at all fond of, the reason being that I have furnished it for going to sleep in. I scarcely ever ask people to stay here—it's far too comfortable for that—but when I get very irritable I settle down here and dream away, gently thinking out plans of how to use my gross riches in irritating my fellow creatures and making a general nuisance of myself. It's surprising how soon I recover my temper here. Even you will find it comfortable. I'm afraid you won't be able to get into any of the baths, but if you're careful not to bump your head, you'll manage all right with the shower. Of course, you've brought your own bed, haven't you?”

It was a pleasant week-end in spite of all the snivelling, for the Macgillivray had a harsh way with colds. “Red wine,” he declared, “is the only infallible remedy. Drink every kind of red wine, and as much of it as you can possibly hold. And eat a lot, of course; eat like beasts, in fact.”

So they dozed away the time, with heavy meals washed down with bottle after bottle of well-warmed Burgundy, and every night, at ten, Bill groped her way up the wide staircase, holding as firmly as she could to the shapely banisters, her head singing gently, and her whole body feeling as if it were a warm cloud, only to find a large glass of port waiting on the table by her bedside. And if she did experience a sense of heaviness the next morning, her cold, at any rate, was undeniably better. All the colds, for that matter, began to wane under this treatment, and by Tuesday the family were triumphing maliciously over Phœbe and Atalanta, who, having

116

succumbed, as their father prophesied, were too anxious for their complexions to follow the Macgillivray's advice.

Bill enjoyed those few days. She had had her fill, for the time being, of new experiences, and it was an immense relief to be away from the staring eyes of ill-mannered Londoners.

"And yet," she reflected, "poor things, how can they help staring, they've never seen any one like me before, and I should stare, I suppose, if I saw a dwarf, at least, I should try not to, but I should want to, all the same. Besides, the more they stare, the more money they pay to come and see me fight, and the sooner I shall be able to retire and live in my own home with everything the right size, in a small village where every one will soon get accustomed to me as if I were normal."

This was the first time she had been left to her own devices since leaving Australia, certainly since landing in England. From the evening when she walked into the library of Cadwallow House and was introduced to the family things had happened so bewilderingly fast on one another's heels, that the last month seemed, in retrospect, a crazy dream. It was something of a relief, too, to be able to escape from the perpetual chatter of the family. In this house, she noticed, they were all very much quieter. No doubt they were sensitive enough to feel the peace and comfort of the place. That, and, of course, the drowsy influence of all the red wine they had drunk. But, whatever it may have been, even Lord Cadwallow allowed his wife's dogmatic statements to pass unchallenged, and kept his muttering to himself.

117

The early January days were raw and sneering with cold. It was no weather for walking over the country, and the animals of the private zoo, which was in the grounds, had long ago been boarded out for the winter in Regent's Park; so, when she was not sleeping off the effects of lunch or dinner, Bill huddled herself in the largest chair she could find in the house, with her tremendous legs stretching away towards the fireplace, reading and dreaming. She had decided to read everything that had been written about giants, and Sebastian had made a list for her of all the books he could think of.

"They seem to have been very good-natured, most of these giants," she remarked to him one afternoon, "which is more than you can say of ordinary sized people, anyway, and they weren't all so soft in the head, either. Look at Gargantua and Pantagruel, now, they were most intelligent, intellectual, even, what with building the Abbey of Thelema and making all those speeches—and think of the cunning way Pantagruel fought against Loup Garou—of course, some giants were rather swine—Goliath, for instance, must have been an awful ruffian, but, then, David was a sneaking little cheat throwing a stone at him like that. But, whatever they may say, we have never been conceited and pompous like the dwarfs—oh, sorry, Sebastian, that wasn't meant personally, you know. You are rather conceited, I do think, but you're not really small enough to be called a dwarf, are you? ..."

"Indeed, I am not," he answered severely, though he never minded being mocked by the giantess, "I measured myself this morning, in the bathroom, and

118

I was exactly four feet eleven, and, what's more, I believe I am still growing because I was less than that—oh, quite a short time ago. Wait until you read *Gulliver's Travels*," he continued, "then you will find some really clever giants, and with such noble characters, too, they'll make you feel superior to the whole human race."

By Wednesday morning the family had recovered from their colds and were in such a state of liverish irritability that the Macgillivray thought it high time for them to return to London. Bill had a heavy period of engagements ahead of her, and the Macgillivray and Titania were anxious to make arrangements for the future. Before they started the Macgillivray held a consultation over the breakfast table.

“Now let it be clearly understood,” he began, “that I am not going to touch a penny of Bill’s earnings. If she is foolish enough to hand over anything to you brood of vultures that has nothing to do with me. She works hard for her money, and she deserves it. But I get all the fun out of her, and it is only right that I should pay for it. And I insist on paying her expenses until she has become heavyweight champion of the world, and made enough money to retire and live in comfort and idleness as far away as she wishes from the prying eyes of inquisitive human beings. As she must have some one to play with her, and as I also happen to get not a little entertainment out of the ridiculous antics of you blackguards, who have the impertinence to call yourself her adopted family, I suppose I shall have to go on paying your expenses as well. But let it be

119

plain from now on, and don’t any of you dare to suggest that you pay for anything, because if you do I shall take you at your word, and then you’ll be in a very uncomfortable position because, of course, you haven’t got a penny between you.”

Lord Cadwallow, who had been listening carefully to this address with his long ear-trumpet supported on his coffee-cup, started to make a most patently insincere protest. But his daughters wrapped him in his Paisley shawl, and bundled him into the back seat of the motor-car, where he spent the entire journey to London trying to get them to listen to him.

When Bill got out of her lorry at Cadwallow House, an hour after the others had arrived, she was surprised to find the door opened by Snowdrop, resplendent in scarlet livery and white silk stockings. She noticed, also, a perfect army of bowler hats in the hall.

“Ah’s e mighty glad to see you back, Miss Bill,” he greeted her, “an’ you, too, Massa Sebastian, and you, too, Massa Malahide. Yes, miss, dat Mister Lightfoot, he done enrolled me in yo’ sarvice.”

“Excellent, Snowdrop, but what are all those bowler hats doing?”

“Dey is de reporters’ hats, miss, dey is. Dere’s twenty-one of dem waiting for you in de gymnasium. Dey’s e been waiting ebber since luncheon time. Yo’ daddy is wid dem now tellin’ how he’s going to make his speech in de House of Lords.”

• • • • •

During the weeks that followed Bill was kept working from the moment she got out of bed until long past midnight, reaping, as Lightfoot expressed

it, the golden harvest of publicity. The newspapers gave her even more space in their columns than before the fight, and, however humorously they treated her activities in the ring, there was no doubt about her importance as a national figure. The most certain indication that a celebrity has attained the heights of fame, is that they should be asked to give their opinions on subjects that have no possible bearing on the qualities which originally made them famous. A Prime Minister's views on detective stories are much more eagerly sought after for publication than any ideas he may cherish on the problems of tariff reform. Similarly, Archbishops are not given a chance to air themselves over the question of disestablishment, but instead, are cunningly trapped into posing as authorities on "The Modern Girl," and into making rash statements about the increase of dance halls being responsible for the growth of illegitimacy in South Wales. No doubt it is all prompted by that passion for the amateur status which is such a feature of the English national character.

The first series of articles that Bill was asked to write were all relevant to her size and profession, and she soon found it extremely monotonous dictating, (Titania had hired for her a most efficient secretary) the same life-story, with occasional variations, the same complaints of "what it feels like to be nine feet high," the same dreary advice on the subject of diet for growing girls, the importance of foot-work for out-size heavy-weights in the ring, why she considered boxing an unsuitable sport for ordinary-sized women, and so on. But after quite a

short time she found she was being asked her views on such subjects as marriage, freemasonry, modern young men, Empire Free-Trade, men's dress reform, the existence of God and personal immortality, the future of public schools, cocktail parties, and a host of other diverse topics. She was also asked by one paper to edit a gossip column, by another to superintend a page of women's fashions, and by several to write serials for them. She did her best to meet all these requests, and soon Cadwallow House was echoing with the clatter of typewriters, and it became necessary to employ two more secretaries.

There were also the advertisements to be attended to. Half an hour every day was set aside for these, and Bill conscientiously traced her large, firm

signature, times without number, at the bottom of her photograph, or under paragraphs, in which she stressed the superiority and perfection of all sorts of commodities. "There!" she said at the end of the first morning as she blotted her name, "that's my tenth favourite kind of cigarette, and on each one it says I never smoke anything else. The number of complaints that various patent medicines are supposed to have cured me of would kill an army, and it seems a shame to deceive poor people into thinking they will grow bigger if they take them. As for face creams, etcetera, any one who reads all those would think I went about looking like a circus clown."

Lord Cadwallow was particularly delighted when the advertisers presented his adopted daughter with samples of the goods to whose excellence she was testifying. "Something else for nothing," he would chuckle to himself, and immediately set about finding

122

a use for every one of the miscellaneous collection of samples, razors, wireless sets, typewriters, starchless breads, bath salts, and the like. But his greatest joy was experienced when one firm presented a motor-mower, and for the next week he was occupied cutting over and over again the few blades of grass which remained on the lawn behind Cadwallow House, until he finally drove it through the kitchen window, and was forbidden ever to touch it again by his family.

Very profitable was Bill's new work and, together with the takings of the Albert Hall for the night of the fight, she soon had a distinctly comfortable sum waiting for her at the bank. But she found the part of social lioness, which she was called upon to play, very much more irksome than writing articles and signing advertisements.

"I don't mind turning out nonsense every day," she told the Macgillivray, "in fact, I really rather enjoy it. Besides, I'm paid so well; but I loathe going to these ridiculous parties, and having every one staring at me and asking silly questions, and I don't get a penny for it either. Why, I'd rather go into training again, though that was tiresome enough, heaven knows."

"Yes, yes, my dear, I know it's a bore, of course, it's an awful bore, but you must live up to your position, you know, you must live up to your position. The more parties you go to the more people see you, and hear about you, and the more famous you become, and the more money you

make. As for training, you shall have plenty of that soon enough, I can assure you.”

“Oh yes, I quite see it’s important,” Bill

123

answered, “but why can’t any of the family ever come with me? Why should I nearly always have to face it by myself?”

“It’s very unfortunate, you see, behaviour at parties is not one of their strong points, is it? You know the old saying, “Rude as a Comet”; wherever they go there’s always a quarrel or an uproar of some sort, and we don’t want anything like that to spoil your social success, do we?”

This was too much for Sebastian. “What impertinence!” he exclaimed. “Really Macgillivray, pot and kettle, how are you! What he means, Bill, is that we are all a little unpopular just now on account of his disgusting party, and his name is absolutely anathema. Why, I should be very surprised if there’s a single house in London where you dare show your grimacing countenance, Macgillivray, except, of course, the Home Secretary’s, and then only because he’s so terrified of your mother.”

“Well,” said Bill, “I suppose I must go on suffering.”

And suffer she did. Every day there were luncheons, cocktail parties and dinners, at each of which her attendance was duly recorded in the newspapers. Sometimes, also, she was called upon to open bazaars, or give away the prizes at beauty competitions, and on these occasions the crowds became almost dangerous in their curiosity as they flocked round her tall form, craning their necks as they stared up at her lofty face. Then, again, she would be in great demand for charity balls and pageants. At one of these, where she represented Diana, the huntress, her appearance was so magnificent that every one held his breath in quite genuine

124

awe, and several old gentlemen, whose heads were a little fuddled, hurried back to their dubs, muttering that a goddess had come down to earth. Small blame to them for their delusion, for Bill was wearing for the occasion a dress of plaited cobalt and silver wire, which Walter Kidney had designed for her. A flashing crescent moon of silvered looking-glass adorned her head, brushing perilously near the ceiling, and the splendour of her appearance, as she came stalking down the room leading two stags, was something altogether more than human.

Yet even these all too public functions were nothing like so embarrassing as the private parties. She quite enjoyed dressing up in fantastic ornaments and wandering round a ball-room, to the sound of slow music. Besides, it was soon over. But so much of her time, alas, had to be spent in strange houses whose furniture was too small for her, and against whose chandeliers she more than once crashed her forehead. And the way they treated her! The impertinent questions, the ridiculous comments, and the exasperating air of patronage!

“It was monstrous,” she complained to Lady Cadwallow one evening when she had just returned from a party at Lady Otolith’s. “I might have been a hired entertainer, from the way she behaved. ‘Now then, Miss Harkaway, stand up and let’s see if the Japanese Ambassador comes up to your waist—there now! I told you he wouldn’t!’ And then, if you please,” Bill continued, “she actually had the impertinence to ask if I’d mind giving a demonstration of my strength by carrying the dining-room table about.”

125

“And I suppose,” ventured Lady Cadwallow in sympathy, “I suppose on top of all the exhibition of bad manners, the food wasn’t fit to eat!”

But Lady Otolith’s dinner party was nothing compared with the luncheon that Mrs. Bogus gave the day after. Bill was ushered into a vast room, the incongruity of whose furniture bore witness to the valiant attempts of its mistress to keep ahead of the fashion. There she was left to be stared at by the other guests who were grouped round the fireplace drinking cocktails. After what seemed at least ten minutes Mrs. Bogus came in and gaily waved her chubby hand in Bill’s direction.

“This is Miss Harkaway,” she said with a titter, “but I expect you’ve gathered that already. You won’t mind having your lunch standing up, will you, Miss Harkaway, for I’m rather afraid I haven’t got a chair which would bear you; and besides then we can all see how tall you are.”

Bill was on the point of marching out of the house, but she controlled her temper with an effort, and ate her lunch, which was served on the top of a stepladder. Mrs. Bogus made no attempt to introduce her to any one, and throughout the meal she encouraged her friends to leave their places and crowd round the giantess as if she were a penny peepshow.

Bill was not only offended by this behaviour, but also a little puzzled. “I thought they were always so obsequious to their lions,” she protested to the

Macgillivray, "and when they asked me at your party both Lady Otolith and Mrs. Bogus were absolutely falling over themselves with politeness."

"You see," the Macgillivray explained, "that was

126

while they were hunting: but once you set foot inside their houses it counts as a kill, so to speak, and they proceed to trample on your corpse. Still," he mused, "they are not usually quite as foul as all that. I suppose they're trying to avenge themselves on me, the hags. Never mind, my dear, never mind, it's all part of your business, and the masses seem to love you just as much as ever."

"They do, indeed, poor wretches. Why, I had a whole batch of letters this morning asking me to stand for Parliament for every conceivable party, and now they want me to become an Honorary Vice-president of the Women's Institute. It's very dull, you know, Macgillivray, being a public figure, even if it is profitable. I've scarcely seen anything of the family this last month, and there's never any one human at these awful parties. It's not like it used to be before the fight, with Wanda and Black Michael, and those other lunatics. I did see the Caretaker's Daughter the other day, but she cut me dead."

"Did she, indeed, the jealous brute! I shouldn't be surprised if she wasn't hatching some foolish plot against the lot of us."

Soon after this Bill had an offer from a music-hall to do a twenty-minutes, turn sparring and showing off her strength. She agreed for a week at fifteen hundred pounds, and set about preparing her "act" with the help of Heber and Professor Thomas.

On the first night the family were all present in the front row of the stalls. Every seat in the house had been taken, and long before the giantess's turn was due every inch of standing room was occupied.

The curtain went up on a boxing ring, and Bill,

127

in white silk shorts and vest, with enormous gloves on her hands, gave an exhibition spar with Heber, and four other heavy-weights recruited by the Professor. She was quite untroubled by nervousness and her boxing was vastly improved compared with the form she had shown at the Albert Hall. She stopped their rushes with complete ease, and towards the end of the spar got so warmed to her work that it became necessary for the Professor

to shout, "Go easy, miss! You don't want to be charged with manslaughter." After that she did a quick change into one of her evening frocks, and came back to perform incredible feats of strength, lifting three men in each hand, and another two, who were roped together, in her teeth. It was a crude enough performance, but the audience were vastly delighted, calling again and again for Bill, until Professor Thomas was in such a state of excitement that he could scarcely be persuaded to leave the stage.

At the end of the last performance of her engagement, Bill huddled herself down the narrow staircase, and sideways through the stage door. As usual, a cordon of police were standing guard over her lorry. Gently she pinched Malahide who had fallen asleep over the steering wheel.

"M-M-M-Macgillivray s-s-says h-he w-wants you to c-c-come b-b-back at once," he began.

"Has anything particular happened?"

"Y-y-yes, I th-th-think s-so, but he w-wouldn't tell me wh-wh-what it w-was, b-b-because he said I sh-should take such a l-l-l-long t-t-t-time telling you."

When Bill got back the family were gathered as

128

usual in the library. Titania and the Macgillivray had their heads bent over a table full of papers and Sebastian was conferring with Lightfoot.

"What's the matter?" asked Bill.

"We are starting for America the day after tomorrow for a six months' tour," said the Macgillivray. "You'll make much more money over there, and, besides, we're a little too unpopular in London at present."

"Too unpopular! Whatever do you mean?" queried Sebastian, "why, it's a month since your party, and haven't you always been unpopular, anyway?"

But the Macgillivray went on looking through his papers, and when he did speak his voice was more serious than any of them had ever heard it to be before.

"I have it on reliable authority," he said at last, "that the Government will go to the country this week over the new Canine Vaccination Act. They will quite certainly be defeated, and that will mean my cousin will no longer be Home Secretary, which is what I have been dreading for the last four years. My enemies will take the opportunity of doing—well, you know

what, Titania—and at this point in Bill’s career we want to avoid all trouble.”

They all pressed him for an explanation, but he would say no more except to point out how obvious it was that the giantess must go to America some time or other if she wished to become heavy-weight champion, and that, in the face of the programme he had arranged for her, it would be silly not to go at once.

129

“What did Macgillivray mean, do you think?” Sebastian inquired of Titania as they were going to bed.

“Oh, only some nonsense or other.” Nevertheless, she knew only too well, and passed a very restless night in consequence.

CHAPTER VIII

THE farewell scene at Southampton was a trifle marred by the tears of Snowdrop. The Macgillivray thought it would be flaunting too much in the face of American colour prejudice to take him with them as Bill's sparring partner, and, on the Professor's advice, had engaged Heber as a substitute.

"Oh, Lordy, Miss Bill," wailed the devoted negro, just before the gangway was raised, "can't ah come with you jes' because ah'm coloured? Dere isn't nobody but me what could put you up to all de tricks dose fellahs ober de water will be playin' on you."

Bill tried her best to comfort him. "Dear Snowdrop," she said, "I only wish you could come, but you know how prejudiced they are against Africans in America, and if they saw me with a black sparring partner it would only make us unpopular and perhaps get you into serious trouble, which would be much worse. You stay behind and help Lightfoot look after the family. Don't worry about me, I shall have the Professor and Heber to take care of me, anyway."

"Dere certainly isn't much dat Bishop Heber

130

doesn't know about funny business," Snowdrop admitted, as he wiped away a tear, "but you know, Miss Bill, he's a clean fighter compared with some ob de toughs dat you'll be meeting. You try an' put them out as soon as the bell goes before dey has time to get their knees up."

The family, too, with the exception of the Macgillivray, Titania and Sebastian, were staying behind. They were not considered at all suited to conditions in the New World, and far too much of a handful to be taken on a strictly business expedition.

"I'm sure I don't know how you'll manage about dressing, miss," whispered Lightfoot, apologetically. "I trust you will forgive me, I do indeed, but I *must* stay and look after his Lordship—I'm hoping to keep him occupied with getting ready the illustrations for his *History of Church Furniture*, and then, of course, there's the Maiden Speech to be prepared, but, even so, I shall have all my work cut out to stop him getting into mischief."

“I shall be all right, Lightfoot,” Bill reassured him. In reality, though she had become very attached to the old servant, she was not altogether displeased at the thought of being free, for a time, from the tyranny which he exercised over her choice of clothes.

Some twenty-four hours later she was kneeling placidly on the floor of the celebrated cocktail bar of the *Nancy Astor*, most up-to-date and newly decorated of Atlantic liners, watching, with her nose pressed against a thick glass port-hole, the sneers on the faces of the dark green waves, as they slunk away

131

past the sides of the ship. Titania, the Macgillivray, and Sebastian, were perched on high stools, drinking glasses of sherry, and seeking information from the barman as to what other celebrities were on board.

“Indeed, yes, sir!” he was telling them, “there’s Izzy Rundle, who is going to fight Lazarillo de Tormes for the fly-weight championship, and I believe we’ve got Charlie Lamb as well this trip. You know, the heavy-weight champion of the world. But we won’t be seeing much of him, I don’t expect: he spends most of his time reading poetry in his state-room. Funny name for a boxer to choose, isn’t it? Don’t see any point in it myself. He used to be called Wolf Meats not so long ago; now, to my mind, that is a proper name for a fighting man, but as soon as he began to make money they tell me he started going in for culture and all that.”

“He sounds,” remarked Sebastian, “as if he could do with a mocking-at; what snobs some of these boxers are!”

“Or villains,” amended the Macgillivray.

In the afternoon they went for a walk on deck and watched their fellow passengers contending for places where a clear view of the ocean was not spoiled by a thread of cordage or a sliver of steel. “Poor innocents!” Sebastian exclaimed—for he was in one of his pompous moods—“they’re so delighted at finding themselves free in this superb space, which the stewards know only too well, from years of experience, to be uninhabitable, combining all the inconveniences and all the stinks of every continent.”

“I haven’t noticed any stinks as yet, but certainly

132

all the inconveniences, I’m with you there,” said Bill. “You’ve no idea, Sebastian, how cramped I find this ship. Much worse than the voyage from

Australia, because then I spent most of my time lying flat on the deck, but I daren't do that here. A crowd would collect immediately."

"I notice," said the Macgillivray, that they aren't staring at you so much these days—at least, not until your back is turned. I hope people aren't beginning to get used to you."

"I don't think it's that," said Sebastian. "No, they're not used to her yet, by any means, but you see, Macgillivray," he continued, "Bill has really become something like the Prince of Wales—you know the way people go about with their heads tucked under their arms, almost, when they happen to be in the same room with him at a dance, or anywhere, thinking, 'Poor fellow, he is off duty now, so we must pretend he's just an ordinary person, he can't help being the Prince, and I'm sure he doesn't always want to be stared at.' It's just the same with Bill, 'Poor girl,' they say, I've heard them, 'it isn't her fault she's that size, I'm certain it must be dreadful for her knowing that every one is always looking at her.' So, if they see her in private, so to speak, they gaze down at their boots. Though, of course, as you remark, when they happen to be behind her they stand on tip-toe to get a good look. But, then, that applies equally to the Prince. I don't think you'll find the Americans will be like that, though, Bill. I imagine they take the more professional, and perhaps more logical, point of view that public figures owe most of their success to the curiosity of

133

the 'masses' and they are, therefore, under an obligation to be stared at whenever opportunity presents itself."

"You're quite right, there, Sebastian, quite right, and I've been something of a public figure myself once or twice," said the Macgillivray. "Personally, I've always found the Americans to be very fair in that respect. If you have the smallest atom of fame or notoriety attached to you, they'll stare you out of countenance, and pay you to let them do it, what's more! But if you have no claims to being any one in particular, or if you or your publicity agent has allowed your reputation to get stale, then the entire nation takes no more notice of you than if you didn't exist. Less, in fact, if it were possible. However, I don't think Bill will be likely to complain of being neglected; not unless she shrinks a good deal."

The next morning, after breakfast, Bill was just settling herself in the special hammock which the stewards had slung for her on the boat deck, any of the ordinary chairs being quite impossibly small, when Bishop

Heber appeared before her and stood respectfully silent for some minutes, breathing hard and wringing his cap in his hands.

“What is it, Heber?” asked Bill, when at last he revealed his presence by a snort which it was impossible to neglect.

“Beg your pardon, miss, but the Professor says could you speak to him for a moment; he’s in his cabin feeling very queer, he told me to tell you.”

“Oh, poor fellow! Of course, yes, I’ll come at once.”

The little academician was lying in his berth with

134

a red woollen shawl wound round his neck, making a doleful contrast with the greenish hue of his countenance. A young man with a fierce Hebrew profile, from which jutted a black cigar, was sitting on a chest of drawers swinging his legs.

“Good morning, miss,” the Professor murmured in a weak voice, very different from that which Bill had so often heard snapping out orders in the ring. “Good morning, miss. I hope you will excuse my condition, but there seems to be a devil, or something, in my inside. I want you to meet Mr. Isidore Rundle, here, who is another celebrated member of the profession. You and he might be able to do a bit of training together, I was thinking. It’s time you started, miss, because you’re fighting in a fortnight.” He raised himself against the pillow and resumed something of his dictatorial manner. “Get down off there, Izzy! Take your cap off and shake hands with the lady; and for God’s sake throw that cigar of yours into the sea, or I won’t answer for the consequences. You’ve no business to be smoking, anyway.”

“Pleased to meet you, I’m sure,” said Mr. Rundle, “I’m afraid my friend ’ere is out of action for the time being, but if you and Heber come along with me we’ll be able to do a bit of work—it’s time I began myself.”

A group of passengers was gathered in the gymnasium, and, looking over their heads, Bill saw that a large, fair-haired young man was skipping diffidently. His face wore a look of self-conscious disgust, as if he were ashamed of himself, of his antics, and of everybody in general. “That’s Charlie

135

Lamb, that is,” Rundle told her, “the present heavy-weight champion; you’ll be fighting him before long, I expect. Here, Charlie,” he cried,

“leave off that step-dancing, and come and meet Miss Harkaway, who’ll be wearing your belt by the end of the year.”

Lamb flung his skipping rope into a corner, smoothed his ruffled hair, wrapped himself in a flowered satin dressing-gown, and came over to where they were standing.

“How do you do, Miss Harkaway?” he said wearily, holding up a carefully manicured hand, “I’ve been hoping to meet you for a long time. You’re Lord Cadwallow’s adopted daughter, I understand, so you probably know Lady Otolith. She’s a very old friend of mine, and Mrs. Bogus, too. I often stay with her when I’m in London. We must have a talk together and you shall tell me all the news. Have you read Virginia Woolf’s new book? Oh, you should, it’s really too lovely, she is the *most* exquisite writer of prose, and the Sitwells, did you see anything of them in London?”

“Aw, Charlie, turn off that social register stuff!” broke in Rundle, “we haven’t time for that now. Miss Harkaway wants a little exercise. You can get her to listen to you about Lady Oxford after dinner. I daresay she’ll even tell you what to wear when you’re presented at Court. Have a couple of rounds with her now, and don’t think you need go easy because she’s a lady. I’ve seen her fight myself, and she’s a regular terror.”

But if Lamb had his social and intellectual pretensions, there was no doubt of his ability with the

136

gloves, as Bill soon discovered when they were in the ring together. The main feature of his strictly orthodox style was a persistently accurate left which he kept on stabbing out whenever it was least expected; and when Bill led at him he would bring over a quick right cross-counter to the body. She found this a trifle disconcerting for the first round of their informal spar. Her great height made it necessary, as we know already, for her to bend forward, thus tending to expose her jaw to an opponent, and once or twice Lamb, who boxed always well on his toes, was able, by a big stretch, to land with some force on her jaw.

“He’s a pretty boxer for such a big fellow, isn’t he, miss?” said Rundle when they were resting in between the rounds.

“It ’im ’arder, fer Gawd’s sake,” Heber grunted, “you mustn’t go so soft, miss, he’s a precious sight too proud of that face of his anyway.”

For the remainder of the time Bill contented herself with blocking Lamb’s leads until, at last, the expression of supercilious conceit on his face

irritated her so that she swung her right for his head. It landed far too high, glancing off above his left ear, but, even so, it was enough to send him sprawling. He got on his feet and drew off his gloves. "I hope to goodness there are no reporters looking on," he said. "Really, Miss Harkaway, you're positively inhuman—but, of course, that was more of a slip than a knock-out."

That night, after dinner, while Titania and the Macgillivray danced, and Sebastian got trapped into conversation by Lamb, Izzy Rundle gave Bill some

137

advice about her boxing. Like so many of his race the little fellow was very good-natured and only too ready to impart information to any Christian to whom he took a fancy.

"You know, Miss Harkaway," he began, as soon as he had squatted himself on the bar, with the giantess kneeling so that their heads were on a level, "what strikes me about your work is that you're much too kind-hearted. I daresay you haven't got your soul in it like I have, but you ought to be able to retire in a very short time, anyway. It seems to me that you don't go hard enough. I saw you fight Heber, and, of course, you were nervous, no doubt, and one couldn't expect to get any idea of your real form, but I think you ought to concentrate on a knock-out in the first round every time. It'll save you a lot of trouble, you'll find. I don't think you know your own strength yet. Look at you! You're an out-size altogether! Think of the biggest fighting man there's ever been—Camera. Why, you could throw him over your shoulder with one hand. They can't any of 'em get near you—they're little children compared with you. And it isn't as if you were slow and clumsy—you're not—you're as quick with your hands and feet, when you want to be, as a kitten."

"It sounds absurd, I know," said Bill, "but, honestly, Mr. Rundle, I'm afraid of hitting any one. When I look down and see the poor little things coming at me, dancing on their toes, working their arms like pistons, I feel quite terrified in case I should hit too hard and kill them."

The Jew laughed—so violently that he nearly fell

138

off the bar. "Yes, I suppose you do, ha! ha! but it seems very funny anybody thinking of an opponent like that. But, then, you're a funny bit of

business altogether, if you don't mind my saying so, Miss Harkaway. You're a freak of nature, that's what you are." He stroked his nose with a broad finger and looked her over for several seconds. "The most extraordinary thing about you to me, though," he went on, "is that you're not out of proportion at all. I've seen one or two giants before, though nothing like your size, of course—the biggest of them was only eight foot six—and they were all soft in the body as well as soft in the head. But you're nothing like them. I believe you've dropped off another planet, or somewhere, where all the people are about four feet larger than any on this one."

"I must confess I sometimes feel like that myself."

"But just you bear in mind, Miss Harkaway, you're a woman! And the first fight you lose they'll never let you in the ring again! Nor will they if you get hurt at all, for that matter. The public won't stand for it. They think it's—what's the word?"

"Decadent?"

"That's it, you've got it—decadent. It was touch and go when you fought Heber, and if you have any trouble the next time, you mark my words, you'll never be allowed to fight another contest. But if you can win 'em all in the first round, and then turn round and smile at the crowd as cool as you'd been making a daisy chain, then you're all right, see! That's why I think you ought to go hard for a knock-out as soon as the bell goes. And remember this; you're going to be the star attraction in

139

the boxing world, and that'll mean less money for some of the other tykes, so you look out for fouls. They'll stick at nothing, those scum! If they can pull any dirty trick that'll bring you down, even if it's only for one second, they'll do it all right—you see if they don't."

Bill found Sebastian stamping irritably up and down on the boat deck, in a fur coat which he had borrowed from the Macgillivray.

"I wish you wouldn't leave me at the mercy of that awful creature," he snapped. The giantess grabbed him and lifted him till his face was on a level with her own, then she held him, at arm's length, out over the rail.

"There!" she said, "I've just been being lectured on how I must be more ferocious and not so kind-hearted, so I thought I'd make a start on you. It's all right, don't wriggle so, I won't let go of you."

“You can keep that sort of ferocity for the ring,” gasped Sebastian, when he was on his feet again. “I’ve been having the most fearful time. Floods of snobbery of every description. And do you know why he changed his name from Meats? It’s really too absurd—he said he did it because Meats sounded so vulgar, and Charles Lamb had always been one of his favourite authors—I thought it was his idea of a joke at first, but not a bit of it. And he wants us all to have tea with him in his cabin to-morrow, so that he can read us his poems aloud. I’ll wager we’ll find *Debrett* is one of the books by his bedside—he seems to know the whole thing by heart.”

“Strange that he should be so set on this refined intellectual pose, because, you know, really,

140

Sebastian, he’s a remarkably good boxer, and very tough, too—so Rundle tells me.”

The night was cold and clear. The two friends walked up and down for some time before going to bed. “The stars at sea seem so close that I almost feel as if I ought to lower my head,” Bill remarked after a long silence.

“Tell me, are you dreading this American tour very much?”

“Not as much as all that, Sebastian, I’m pretty well broken into circus life by now.”

During the three days that remained of the crossing, all four of them suffered a good deal from Lamb’s attentions, and often it was only by exercising the greatest tact that Bill and Titania managed to restrain the Macgillivray from an outburst. The Macgillivray was suffering from some depression. Indeed, he had never quite recovered his normal gaiety which he lost on the eve of the American expedition. In silence he received the news of the fall of the government, wirelessly to the *Nancy Astor*, and spent the whole of that day muttering to himself as he tramped the deck. The irritation that Lamb caused him gave opportunity for the relief of some of his pent-up feelings, and when the two girls checked him he became extremely angry.

“But you must remember, Macgillivray,” said Titania, after one of these explosions, “that it would be bad business to offend the creature, particularly if you want to stage the fight for the world’s championship in England. Do try and keep on the right side of him—it only needs a little self-control. And also try and remember,” she

141

added, "to behave properly in America; it isn't like at home, where you always seem to have a kind of special licence."

In the morning Bill used to spar with Heber in a ring which was put up on the deck for the benefit of the passengers. "Don't spare me, miss," the gallant fellow would tell her at the start, for he, too, had been in consultation with Rundle. "Don't for Gawd's sake spare me on no account. I was born to be knocked about." And, if she did put him out for a minute or so, his first words, on opening his eyes, were always, "Gaw I that was a beauty, that was, I'd like to feel you give me another like that, miss!"

The day before they reached New York Professor Thomas was sufficiently recovered to make an appearance. He held a long conference with Rundle and the Macgillivray, and afterwards took a walk with Titania. When the vessel happened to sink down suddenly and then rise again, he would give the captain's bridge one of those looks, with which people sometimes chastise a servant who has forgotten to touch his hat.

The next morning Bill was up early to watch the astonishing sky-line of New York as it advanced to meet her. She was preparing herself for the onslaught of reporters which she knew she would have to face as soon as they landed. Something plucked at her skirts, and, looking down, she saw Izzy Rundle.

"I'll say good-bye, now, Miss Harkaway," he said, "but we'll meet again all right, and don't you forget what I was telling you the other evening.

142

I'll come and see you fight as soon as I can manage it."

She was sorry to part with the little fellow; he had been so kind and natural and unaffected, such a contrast to the heavy-weight champion with his airs and affectations, and his snobbish contempt for the profession. They were passing the Statue of Liberty now. Bill shivered a little as she thought of what lay in front of her; then she went down to collect her things.

CHAPTER IX

THE next six months were a nightmare for the giantess. Compared with them her experiences in London were no more disturbing than a summer afternoon spent in a hammock. In the turmoil of activity into which she was plunged, she lost count of days and nights and often found herself wondering if she were really alive or only a part of some one else's dream. But of one fact always, as she used frequently to tell Sebastian, was she definitely certain—that her tour of America, whether real or imaginary, was clearly being a roaring success.

The Macgillivray boasted that he and his agents had arranged that, except for the time spent in sleeping and getting from one place to another (and most of their travelling was done by night) not a moment should pass without money being made. Her contests, although she fought on an average twice a week, were but incidental features in Bill's programme, never taking more than a few minutes.

143

The greater part of her day was occupied with what Titania called the peep-show. In every town they visited the largest place of amusement had been booked in advance; and here Bill was on show eating her meals, training with her sparring partners, walking about in her most spectacular clothes, performing a hundred other perfectly ordinary everyday functions and sometimes even delivering a lecture on diet, physical culture, the position of women in the Middle Ages, or any other subject which happened on that particular day to have captured her fancy. For an additional payment of a dollar it was possible to shake hands with her and for two more she would converse in a friendly fashion with as many persons as the space on the stage permitted. Then, in the evenings, there were parties to be attended. ("America," the Macgillivray had declared, "is the home of the professional, just as England is the home of the amateur—over here we must make them pay for everything, in, or out, of reason.") For a thousand dollars Bill would appear at these entertainments for the space of an hour, allowing herself to be introduced, say something to every one present, and afterwards give some kind of display of her physical powers. Always,

before leaving to go on to the next party, she used to sign her name level with the top of her head on the wall.

As for the newspapers and advertisements, the revenue derived from them soon exceeded anything the Macgillivray, even in his most optimistic moments, had dreamt of. Wherever they stayed in the course of their journeying a host of secretaries would be clacking away on typewriters, striving to

144

keep pace with the constant demand for signed articles and testimonials by the giantess, and to deal with her fanmail. The fact was that the great American public became obsessed to the verge of dementia by Bill. Had she been a mere circus giantess, ugly, deformed, and slobbering, the general interest would have been confined to her boxing. But she combined so many other qualities of public attraction besides being the obvious future heavy-weight champion of the world. Was she not an English débutante and the adopted daughter of the oldest peerage in the British Isles? Was she not also sponsored by that most fashionable and illustrious personage, the Macgillivray of Ballas? Were not her clothes, her figure, and her famous smile just the smartest things that had ever been seen? And was not her charm of manner quite irresistible?

Every one of the myriad races, which composed the population, found some characteristic that appealed to it, and the resulting popularity proved so overwhelming that it became necessary, after the first two days in New York, for Bill to be escorted by a large bodyguard, under the command of Bishop Heber, whenever she left her hotel; and the traffic regulations during her stay were tacitly disregarded. For three hours, one morning, the whole length of 5th Avenue was crammed solid with vehicles and pedestrians owing to a rumour that she was going shopping. People stood up on the roofs of their cars, people suspended themselves from the windows of their apartments, people festooned the street lamps and the air was thick with streamers and scraps of paper.

145

The tour was planned to begin with a month in New York, and Bill's first fight took place a fortnight after she landed. That night Madison Square Garden was packed with a crowd which represented half the wealth of the United States. The giantess fought a second-class heavy-weight

called Ted Sick, and, remembering Rundle's advice, she wasted no time, but laid him flat on his back, within twenty-two seconds from the sounding of the bell, by means of a left to the head. Her other three fights in New York were all won on knock-outs in the first round, and it was obvious to Heber and the Professor that her boxing had improved out of all knowledge. She fought now with a fierceness which was most unlike her ordinary gentle nature and when Sebastian remarked upon it she said, "Don't worry, my character is just the same, but I'm being business-like, and besides I want to get it all over as soon as possible, and it's kinder to finish them off quickly, the poor little darlings!"

The morning after each fight, Bill never failed to visit her opponents in their nursing homes, taking with her, as presents for each of them, a bunch of flowers, a flask of gin, and a signed photograph of herself. These visits served the double purpose of providing the press with excellent photographs and further endearing the giantess to her public.

They left New York, with the intention of returning to it at the end of the tour, in a special railroad car which had been the property of a Lithuanian dance-orchestra king who had the distinction of being the fattest man in the United States. The furniture, therefore, with some alterations, more or

146

less fitted the giantess's frame so she was not unduly cramped during their travels.

The journey westward was one long triumphal procession and even Bill began to feel something of the elation of a conqueror. Every town they stopped at she was fêted by the civic authorities and when she entered the ring the spectators rose to their feet and cheered, singing, "God save the King" and "The Star-Spangled Banner" alternately. At Buffalo the Mayor presented her with a golden statuette of himself in his municipal robes, which he told her he had originally intended for the Queen of Rumania. At Detroit the train was met by a deputation from the famous Barbarossa Maternity Home asking if Miss Harkaway would be godmother to all the babies born in that year.

But perhaps the greatest honour conferred on her was at Chicago where the great Scarface Al Capone insisted on coming out of jail, in order that he might personally supervise her entertainment during her stay in his city. The illustrious gangster issued an edict that no shots were to be fired, that no bombs were to be thrown, that no beating up should take place, that no

blackmail should be levied, that no millionaires or theatrical stars were to be “taken for a ride,” and finally that instant destruction should be visited on any one who attempted to kidnap the giantess or in any other way interfere with her activities. When the train came in he was standing on top of an enormous barrel of gin with his hat in one hand, waving a banner, inscribed WELCOME, with the other. The Macgillivray was so encouraged by this reception that he made arrangements for an

147

extra fight. They had no expenses to pay in Chicago. Mr. Capone was so enchanted with the giantess that he insisted on giving herself and her party the freedom of the hotels—a piece of generosity which had unfortunate results for Sebastian, rendering him unconscious for forty-eight hours and very nearly losing him the use of his eyesight. (Sebastian held firmly to the English tradition of drinking as much as you can put inside you when somebody else is paying for it.) In return for all this hospitality Bill won her three fights against Messrs. Bob Vile, Joe Dirt, and Jack Gob, with an ease which delighted every one. On her last night, after she had knocked out Gob in fifteen seconds, the audience clamoured for a speech. Mayor Thompson proposed her health on behalf of the citizens of Chicago in particular and the State of Illinois in general, declaring that she was the finest ambassador England had ever sent across the water, besides being the first English person who had ever condescended to speak to him. Then Bill, having wrapped a stars and stripes dressing-gown round her shoulders, replied with an affectionate little speech, punctuated by smiles; and the evening finished with a party on the lake at which Mr. Capone asked for her hand in marriage while a male quartette, recruited from his followers, sang what they called “English glee-songs” in her honour.

From Chicago they continued westward bound for California, stopping at St. Louis (where Bill lowered her record by knocking out her man in nine seconds and the negroes howled like baboons with admiration), Omaha, and Salt Lake City. It took Sebastian some time to recover from Chicago. When he was

148

not throwing bread at the prairie dogs he used to spend all day in the observation car, sitting on Bill’s lap, drinking in the crisp blue air and steady sunlight which played over the vast plains of the Middle West.

At Salt Lake City Bill had the hardest fight of the tour. Her opponent was a South American giant named Riobamba who stood seven feet high and weighed twenty-three stone. Though an inexperienced boxer he was tougher than any one she had yet encountered. For over two minutes he stood up to the rain of blows which descended on his head, without any more signs of dismay than an occasional grunt, and, had it not been for the resourceful Heber, Bill might have lost confidence. Already she was beginning to relapse into the distressing form which she had shown during the first fight in London, when Bishop Heber yelled at her, "His abdomen, miss, for God's sake, go for his abdomen!" Somehow, in spite of the yelling of the crowd, the giantess heard him and pulled herself together in time to deliver a beautiful right hook to the solar plexus. Just after the referee counted "ten," the bell went for the end of the round. The men of Salt Lake City, usually so grave-faced and pompous, went crazy over the giantess and when Riobamba's manager claimed a foul it was all she could do to stop them from tearing him in pieces.

She fought again in San Francisco and the last of the Spanish settlers mortgaged the remaining shreds of their property, beyond hope of redemption, in order to buy seats in the gallery, while the frenzy of the Oriental population grew so dangerous that it had to be controlled by the police. The morning after her

149

first fight, she was aroused by the sounds of squabbling and was told that fifty of the richest Japanese and Chinese in the city were waiting in her hotel, having pooled their funds, in order to make a bid which might tempt the Macgillivray to part with her.

From San Francisco they went south to Los Angeles to fulfil a contract which the Macgillivray had arranged over the telephone the moment they had landed in New York. So stupendous, indeed, had been the figure suggested by the film magnates, that he had actually cancelled two fights in order to make time. And so for three weeks, under the dazzling glare and intense heat of the Hollywood studios, Bill experienced a world where everything was in proportion to her size; for the sets were all ready, constructed in accordance with her measurements. As to what films she was acting in she had no idea, but hour after hour she acted and spoke in obedience to the orders which were shouted at her in broken English

through countless megaphones, learning snatches of her various parts in the intervals while the sets were being changed.

By now the heavyweight boxers throughout the United States were thoroughly alarmed. Furious at their loss of dignity and prestige, they realised the ridicule with which their profession would be covered as soon as the giantess became heavy-weight champion of the world—and that, barring accidents, could not fail to become a reality by the end of the year. Already there had been a marked falling off in the attendances at heavy-weight contests since her arrival, and her fellow pugilists saw, in her success, a serious danger threatening their own means of

150

livelihood. There seemed to be no possibility of defeating her in the ring—she invariably knocked out her opponent before he had a chance to foul against her—and she was always so strongly guarded that kidnapping was out of the question. In the face of these gloomy considerations the leading heavy-weight boxers of America summoned a congress to consider ways and means of dealing with this menace to their existence.

The first sign of opposition was noticed on the return journey to New York, at Pittsburg, where the Macgillivray had arranged for an extra fight at the last moment. On arriving at the station Bill was a little upset by the reception which greeted her. The bomb, she was informed, which removed so many straw hats from the crowd of onlookers, had undoubtedly been intended for herself. It could not, moreover, have been thrown by the civic authorities, who greeted her with such charming old-world courtesy. For the first time she became conscious of the existence of enemies—and the thought distressed her. Not that she was frightened; but she was affronted, and her feelings were hurt.

That evening in the ring, as she carried the horizontal form of her opponent to his corner, she felt something sing past her ear. Later Sebastian, rather green in the face, burst into her dressingroom.

“You’ve been shot at!” he said. “It was a man with a cauliflower ear and two cigars in his mouth. He was sitting in the ring-side seats close to the opposite corner, but he dived into the crowd before I could get near him.”

151

Bill’s last fight in New York was the most important of her tour. For her opponent had been selected Len Evil, acknowledged, with the exception of

Charles Lamb, to be the most formidable heavy-weight in the world.

The stars were splendid and the moon as beautiful as a great camellia that night when Bill and Sebastian drove away from the hotel. But the soft brightness of the night was put to shame by the blaze of arc lights illuminating the ring. The giantess was nervous. Every now and then she whistled softly through her teeth and once she crumpled Sebastian's hand between her finger and thumb until he was forced to squeak. There had been ugly rumours stealing about the city. That morning, for no apparent reason, the odds in Bill's favour had shortened in a way which was most alarming. The Macgillivray, in order that there should be no repetition of the shooting at Pittsburg, had insisted that machine guns be mounted in a position controlling the entire mass of spectators. Nevertheless Bill was uneasy. It was not that she feared the possibility of another attempt on her life, but there was a definite foreboding of mischance in the air. "I feel certain," she remarked, as they entered the dressingroom, "that something both nasty and unexpected will happen."

Rapidly the seats were filled, the bootleggers left off boasting of their sapphire shirt studs, the cigar smoke was detected creeping across the shafts of light from the arc lamps, only five minutes remained before the scheduled time of the fight. On the floor of Bill's dressing-room Sebastian lay reading aloud

152

from *Grimm's Fairy Tales*—his customary method of calming his big friend's nerves—when Heber poked his head round the door, muttering, "There's a gentleman to see you. Says it's urgent"—and in came Isidore Rundle, quivering all over with excitement like a little puppy dog.

"Good evening, excuse me, miss," he said, "but I want to warn you Len Evil has arranged with Jim Pansy, the referee, that he's going to fall flat in the first ten seconds and Jim Pansy is going to disqualify you for fouling. You must knock him out of the ring, Miss, as soon as the bell goes, it's your only chance."

Bill looked up from the contemplation of her finger nails. "Oh, so that's it, is it?" she said. "I knew there was some funny business in the offing. It's very kind of you to come and tell me, Mr. Rundle. I hoped we should meet again."

"Yes, indeed, miss, I've been following your career with the greatest interest, but it's only to-day that we've happened to be in the same place.

Now don't you be afraid to hurt him, but as soon as the bell goes you send him flying out of the ring. I should try a right swing, if I were you. He'll be coming in at you because he wants to get to close quarters so that he can pretend you've hit him low."

Thanks to Rundle's warning there was no question as to who won the fight. Immediately the bell went, Bill darted from her corner and Evil retreated against the ropes and covered up. Bill swung her right with more vigour than she had ever put into any previous punch, and Evil went sailing over the ropes to land in the laps of the newspaper reporters. He was too dazed even to try and climb back into the ring. The

153

referee held a consultation with the myrmidons and came away shaking his head. Then, in a voice which was thick with rage and disappointment, he declared Bill to be the winner on a technical knock-out.

So ended the most important fight of the tour, and the giantess's reputation remained untarnished.

After a formal reception by the President and a dinner in her honour at the British Embassy in Washington, Bill returned to New York. All the members of her party were utterly exhausted. In six months the giantess had made close on a quarter of a million pounds—and, owing to the generosity of the infatuated American people, her expenses had been nothing like so heavy as the Macgillivray had anticipated. They stayed a last week in New York while the Macgillivray negotiated with Lamb and his managers about staging the fight for the world's heavy-weight championship. He was determined, now that money was no longer a primary consideration, that it should take place in London and to this end he made a subtle appeal to the snobbery of the champion. At last an agreement was reached—the Macgillivray was to shoulder the financial responsibility of taking the Stadium at Wembley, the date being provisionally fixed for early November.

On a bright blue morning, to the acclamation of all the sirens of the ships at the mouth of the Hudson river, the Macgillivray's circus began its homeward voyage. In honour of the giantess an attempt had been made to decorate the Statue of Liberty with a pair of boxing gloves. The Macgillivray, draped in a tartan ulster, leant over the rail and addressed the waters of the Atlantic.

154

“Good-bye, ludicrous and uncomfortable country,” he muttered; “your only advantages are hot water and turtle soup ...”

“What’s the matter, dear, aren’t you well?” inquired Bill.

“I am having an orgy of contempt,” he answered, “we mountebanks are never able to do anything but despise the half-wits we impose upon.”

“That,” said Bill, “I consider both rude to me and churlish towards those darling Americans who have made me a rich woman and saved you nearly all my expenses.”

But at that moment Titania approached them waving a flimsy piece of paper.

“Listen,” she said, “ *‘Imperative you return at once stop have received the writ of summons to attend House of Lords stop insist upon your support during delivery of Maiden Speech stop Cadwallow.’* ”

CHAPTER X

THE blue vapours of an autumn evening had curled themselves about Regent's Park, making it appear a vast aquarium, through whose dim grottoes the people drifted vaguely as forlorn sea-monsters. The trees were shedding their leaves and stood waiting for the lash of winter to fall upon their naked backs. The sadness of the year, as it lay down to die, seemed to have reached the inhabitants of the Zoo, and, from time to time, there shrilled through the laden air the dolorous howl of a timber wolf, or the petulant scream of a gibbon.

155

But inside Cadwallow House all was excitement and festivity and the moribund waters of the canal mirrored in gleaming rectangles the radiance of its windows. For, in honour of the return of his adopted daughter from America, Lord Cadwallow had turned on every light in the house. It was apt, he considered, that she, to whose bounty the installation of electricity was due, should be greeted by a wholesale illumination. That, at any rate, was the explanation he gave his wife, though, in reality, it was himself who derived the utmost pleasure from manipulating the switches. "Wonderful thing, electric light,"—he was in the habit of remarking—"can't imagine how we ever got on without it. You press the button down and turn night into day, and then, of course, if you like, you can press it up and turn day into night again; doesn't do to set your watch by it, though." To which his wife would reply, "Sit down and be quiet, Hilary! If you play the fool with it once more I shall tell Snowdrop to tie your hands behind your back."

This evening they were sitting, as usual, in the library—Lord and Lady Cadwallow, Phœbe and Atalanta, Malahide and Mr. Kenneth the pawnbroker, who had been asked over for tea to greet the travellers. Since the departure of the expedition to America the library had undergone a considerable transformation. Not only were there books in the shelves, legs to the chairs, and a full equipment of glass in the windows, but there were also several new articles of furniture, mostly of an ecclesiastical character. Facing the door, for instance, was an Elizabethan family pew, and at the far end of the

156

room stood an early Saxon font. Lord Cadwallow had determined that the page-proofs of his *History of Church Furniture* should be corrected in the proper surroundings.

Tea was over and the family hushed in silent expectancy. Downstairs in the dining-room, the reporters and press photographers drank whisky and exchanged limericks, while outside the mounted police made a lane through the crowd which would permit a car to drive up to the doors.

Presently there began a shuffling of feet and a murmur which articulated itself into loud cheering and cries of "here she is." A few seconds later the lorry hove in sight, and down stepped the giantess, magnificent in her furs and smiling wearily at the ranks of her admirers. Lightfoot and Snowdrop swung open the heavy double doors and, hand in hand with Sebastian and Titania, she entered the house.

But it was some time before they were able to go up to the family. Interviews had to be given and photographs taken. "*Never neglect the press*" was always one of the Macgillivray's first principles—"do your duty by the press and the press will do its duty by you." But at last even the curiosity of the youngest reporters was satisfied, and once again Bill bowed her head as she crossed the threshold of the library.

The family rose at her like driven partridges, pestering her with questions, and the story of her adventures in America continued until long past dinner. The delight of Lord and Lady Cadwallow, when they realised how truly staggering was the fortune which Bill had amassed, was almost indecent.

157

"A quarter of a million pounds," his lordship kept on repeating, "why, that would furnish a cathedral, just think of it!"

"You will do no such thing, Hilary," said his wife. "It is quite enough that you have turned this room into a crypt. I will allow nothing more than a small chapel, and that must be in the country."

"You b-b-both s-s-seem to be f-f-forgetting," interrupted Malahide, "th-that it's Bill's money"—a remark which effectively subdued them for some minutes.

"Oh, by the way, Bill," said Atalanta, "the Caretaker's Daughter rang up this morning to say that she and Lady Otolith and Mrs. Bogus were giving an enormous party for you the night after tomorrow. I said I supposed you'd go."

“That was very foolish of you, Atalanta,” said the Macgillivray, “Bill is dead tired—so are we all, for that matter—and she is going down to the country for a rest. Now I shall have to tell them she can’t come.”

“Good gracious me, Macgillivray! Why, I declare, you sound almost as if you were frightened of them. That’s not like your usual self. What’s come over you?”

“Leave him alone, Atalanta!” snapped Titania, crossly, “can’t you see we’re all exhausted?”

But the expression on the Macgillivray’s face was one of terror rather than fatigue. He had poked a hole in a cushion and was now engaged in plucking forth the stuffing, twining and weaving it between his nimble fingers.

“I shall be very relieved,” he whispered, “very

158

relieved when I can get away from London. I have a most horrible presentiment of misfortune, and let me assure you, dearest Titania, my fears are by no means so exaggerated as you may suppose.”

“Never mind,” she answered softly, “I will look after you.”

Sebastian looked at them and narrowed his eyes. They had been growing very affectionate, those two, of late. True, they had always been good friends, but there was now an especial tenderness in the way they behaved towards one another. He had been particularly struck with it on the boat coming over. With every hour that they neared England, the Macgillivray had become more uneasy and Titania correspondingly more motherly. If this nervousness of the Macgillivray’s continued anything might happen—even a wedding.

Bill, who by this time was nearly asleep, suddenly jumped to her feet and almost felled a seven-branched candelabra hanging from the ceiling.

“Good gracious!” she cried, “we’ve forgotten all about the Maiden Speech.”

“Why, so had I,” said Lord Cadwallow. “Phœbe, just run upstairs to my bedroom and bring me down the large official envelope which should be on the dressing table.”

“If you read that nonsense aloud again, Hilary, I shall leave the room,” announced his wife.

“Then you must leave it, my dear, that’s all. Of course I shall read it! How else will these children know what is happening?”

He added a third pair of spectacles to the two already on his nose and took the envelope from

159

Phœbe. "It occurred to me the other day," he began, nodding his head in the direction of the giantess, "that, not only have I to make my Maiden Speech in the House of Lords, but I have also to take my seat. The day after tomorrow I propose to kill two birds with one stone. This document, which I hold in my hand, is the Writ of Summons, issued under the authority of the Great Seal, and at my first appearance I have to present it at the table of the House of Lords, before taking the oath. Now you listen, my dear. His Majesty addresses me in such an intimate and affectionate manner that I really don't know whether I ought to be flattered or affronted. After all I have never made the fellow's acquaintance and yet I suppose he does, in a sense, occupy a privileged position. This is how he begins, 'George the Fifth by the Grace of God, etc., to our right trusty and well beloved, greeting'—then he goes on to say he has—'ordered a certain parliament to be holden at our City of Westminster'—*his*, I suppose he must mean, or perhaps, his and the Duke of Westminster's—'and there to treat and have conference with the prelates, great men and peers of our realm'—yes, well that, if not actual flattery, is at least politeness. Since your mother shows no signs of leaving the room I won't weary you with the rest of it, but what it amounts to is that he wishes me to give him my counsel upon the weightiness of certain affairs and imminent perils. Unfortunately, he omits to tell me what these are; and how on earth should I know? At any rate, I am determined, for once, to make my voice heard in the land, and so long as it is heard, I don't mind in the

160

least what it says; besides, I have prepared and memorised a series of speeches which will suit any occasion."

"If you will excuse me, m'lord," ventured Lightfoot, who had been listening respectfully all this while, "you will excuse me, but I am afraid you are not fully aware of the details of the procedure. After the members of both Houses have taken the oath there follows the King's speech——"

"My dear Lightfoot, do you mean to tell me that I am not able to speak until after the King's speech?"

"That is the procedure, I am afraid, m'lord."

“Well, I think it most inconsiderate of His Majesty. He writes asking me to attend his Parliament and give him my counsel, when all the time he really means that I have got to listen to him speaking. And what happens after his speech? Then I suppose I may say what I like.”

“After the King’s speech is over, m’lord, it is discussed by both Houses separately.”

“But this is preposterous, Lightfoot. Not only do I have to listen to the speech but I also have to listen to other people talking about it.”

“I suggest your lordship will have ample opportunity for making yourself heard on any subject you please. The King’s speech, I think I am right in saying, generally covers a great deal of ground, and touches upon all the affairs of state which are held to be of any importance. Your lordship will be at liberty to discuss any aspect of it which you think fit.”

“Will it deal with India, Lightfoot?”

161

“Yes, indeed, m’lord, without any doubt it will deal with India.”

“And with Education, do you suppose?”

“Probably, m’lord, though not, I dare say, in any great detail.”

“And with the necessity for keeping a firm check on the lower orders?”

“I think not, m’lord. Perhaps you have forgotten that the Labour Party is in power just now.” “Is it, indeed? I never knew they allowed the beasts to vote at all, much less sit in Parliament. Did you, Macgillivray?”

The Macgillivray cast a wild glance round the room as if he were expecting a calamity.

“Don’t please discuss it in my presence,” he said, hurriedly, “it makes me feel quite sick. If you were all there, instead of not at all, you would remember that they got in after Christmas and since then, of course, my cousin, the Home Secretary, has been out of Office. It happened just after we left for America.”

Lord Cadwallow lowered his ear trumpet. “But anyway, Lightfoot,” he continued, “you think that the speeches I have been preparing will not be wasted?”

“Indeed, they will not, m’lord, and I have taken the liberty of asking Lord Chargehead if he will escort you on one side, and Lord Bolus if he will escort you on the other.”

“What do you mean, escort me? Where? Why? I should have thought I was a good deal better at looking after myself than Bolus. Why, the poor

fellow has only got one very cheap cork leg, besides always dribbling down his beard at meals.”

162

“That, again, is part of the procedure, m’lord. You have to be escorted to the table, where you take the oath with one peer of your own rank on either side of you, and you are preceded by either the Gentleman-Usher of the Black Rod, the Yeoman-Usher, the Sergeant-at-Arms, or the Deputy-Sergeant-at-Arms.”

“I should think the Deputy-Sergeant-at-Arms would not require such a large gratuity as the others, wouldn’t you, Lightfoot?”

“Set your mind at rest, m’lord. I have already asked Lord Chargehead, and he tells me that tipping is not the custom.”

“Thank goodness for that! Well then, to-morrow I take the oath and the next day after the King’s speech I get a chance of making myself heard.”

“And the next day,” said Bill firmly, “we retire to the country.”

“Where Macgillivray and I will join you,” said Titania, “as soon as we have made final arrangements for the world’s championship fight.”

• • • • •

Only Lightfoot accompanied Lord Cadwallow when he went to take the oath, for the family refused to spend more than one afternoon in the House of Lords.

“It is nonsense, Hilary, perfect nonsense!” declared her ladyship when he complained of being neglected. “I know exactly what would happen if we went—you would forget yourself, and commit some ridiculous nuisance, for which you would be thrown out. Isn’t it enough for you that we shall be there to-morrow?” And with that she bundled him

163

into the cab, wrapping his robes round him, while Lightfoot gave a final polish to the coronet with the Paisley shawl.

And indeed, his lordship’s behaviour at the ceremony, judging by Lightfoot’s account, was not altogether satisfactory. “I assure you, m’lady,” the old servant narrated that evening, when they were back again, “I had the very devil with him. Yes, I should think so. He began by poking his head out of the window all the way down Whitehall, and shouting out loud that there was still life in him, even if he was an anachronism. Then his coronet dropped off and the wheel of a bus went over it, so we had to go to

the Army and Navy Stores to get it straightened. After that everything was all right until he got up to the table to take the oath. Of course, I was in the gallery by then. First he complained that Lord Bolus was insulting him on purpose by not having his breeches buttons done up properly and then he said Lord Chargehead was drunk. Then he refused to stay in his proper place in the queue and tried to take the oath out of turn. And then, if you please, he couldn't find the Writ of Summons. 'Hi, Lightfoot,' he shouts up to me, 'what the devil did you do with that Writ? Did I put it down the ——' 'No, sir, you did not!' I howls back fiercely at him, for you know how liable he is to indiscretions of the tongue in public places. And what do you think he had done with it? Would you believe it, m'lady, he'd stuffed it inside one of his shoes, which was loose. You may imagine my embarrassment! Such behaviour, and the first time he's ever been to the House of Lords! I *was*

164

ashamed. I wonder they let him take his seat, I do indeed.

Well, after he had taken the oath—he was just about the last of them—I went round and apologised to the Lord Chancellor. He was as pleasant as could be. 'I hope you will forgive Lord Cadwallow for the rather irreverent way he carried on this afternoon,' I said, 'but the fact is the poor old gentleman is a little forgetful of his surroundings, to say nothing of being eccentric into the bargain;' and the Lord Chancellor, he said, 'Not at all,' he said, 'I like to see them like that, it's the way they ought to behave—properly in keeping with the traditions of the Upper House. Why, whatever would the country be coming to if the Senior Peer acted like an ordinary person? Just you give Lord Cadwallow my congratulations on his performance this afternoon, and tell him I wish there were more like him.' I saw the Deputy-Sergeant-at-Arms, and he told me he'd seen them dotty before, but never anything like his lordship. He said he ought to be Prime Minister, he did."

"At any rate," Lady Cadwallow remarked, "my husband appears to have acquitted himself with distinction, if not exactly with credit."

"Just so, m'lady, just so. That's what the policeman told me on the way out, only he expressed himself a little differently."

• • • • •

The arrival of the prelates, great men and peers, and their wives and families, at the Houses of Parliament for the King's speech was attracting

the usual spectators, reporters and photographers. But no

165

sooner did Bill step out of her lorry than the dignity of the occasion was forgotten, and, in a mad rush which defied the police, the crowd surged round the giantess. It was her first public appearance since she returned from America, and every one was anxious to welcome their national hero. Lord and Lady Cadwallow were as enchanted with the popular demonstration as if it had been entirely in their own honour.

“The dear people,” said her ladyship as she twined one of her white curls securely round her coronet in order to keep it steady and tugged her red velvet train away from under the feet of a policeman, “The dear people! Why, Hilary, who would have thought they would have been so pleased to see us?”

“I confess,” answered her husband, “that I did not expect quite such enthusiasm. Should I say anything, do you think?” But Lightfoot, who was prepared for just such an outbreak of eloquence, dragged him inside the doors before he could start declaiming and handed him over to the Lords Chargehead and Bolus, while Bill and the rest of the family made their way to the gallery.

The King’s Speech was delivered with all the usual formalities, but most of the attention of the assembly was directed towards the gallery. By one of those dramatic chances, which sometimes lend a glamour to public occasions, a ray of sunlight had found its way into the House of Lords. But instead of picking out one of the prelates, peers, or great men of the realm, it chose to illumine and make more golden the fair head of the giantess. As she sat beside Lady Cadwallow and gazed down at the rows

166

of upturned faces, Bill felt an impulse to stand up and bow. In America, indeed, it would have been expected of her. But the King went on reading his Speech, regardless. When he reached the section dealing with India, Lord Cadwallow was observed to rise to his feet; but only for a moment. The Lords Chargehead and Bolus, who had been on the look-out for any signs of restlessness on the part of their friend, instantly grabbed him by his robes and pulled him to his seat.

When the King’s Speech was over and the faithful Commons had departed, the family went back to lunch with Macgillivray at Carlton House

Terrace. They found him in the aquarium seated in front of a tank of dog-fish. It was a comparatively new toy, this aquarium, and had been installed while he was away on the American expedition. "I am tired of flowers," he had declared to his butler before leaving, "I shall have fish instead; they are just as decorative and far more companionable." The butler's imagination, however, had not gone further than dog-fish, conger-eel and skate, yet the Macgillivray seemed perfectly satisfied, and was now engaged in naming his fish after the friends they most resembled. "That one," he was saying when the family entered, "is undoubtedly Lord Cadwallow, he wears his fins like a shawl and doesn't appear to know in which direction he is going. As for that particularly hideous malevolent villain creeping away behind the rock in the corner, he is obviously the new Home Secretary."

Titania was delighted to find her friend in such high spirits and said as much.

167

"Ah, it is only because I am so looking forward to your father's speech this afternoon. It will be my first real entertainment since the party last New Year's day." He turned to Lord Cadwallow, "And how did you find the King's Speech? Was there plenty of material for you to discuss?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, Macgillivray, I didn't hear very much. I am, as you know, a trifle deaf, and moreover, I was not in a very favourable position. Chargehead tells me that at the mention of India I sprang to my feet, but I have no recollection of doing any such thing and I strongly suspect he was lying. For this afternoon I am going to get Lightfoot to read aloud to me from the evening papers, and find out exactly what *was* said—not that it really matters in the slightest, because, as I told you yesterday, I have speeches of my own ready to suit any occasion."

.

At a quarter past four, the family were back again in the House of Lords, gazing down on Lord Cadwallow as he arranged his papers and uncoiled his ear-trumpet. As time went on the old gentleman began to grow flustered. He knew that the necessary quorum of members for a debate in the House of Lords was only three, including the Lord Chancellor, and that dignitary was already in position on the woolsack; but even so they were still one short. If nobody else turned up during the next few minutes, the House would have to be adjourned. However, he was not to be disappointed

for, as Big Ben sounded the half-hour, Lord Stroat came sauntering in and threw himself down on the seat

168

beside Cadwallow. The quorum of three was complete.

“Chargehead tells me,” said Stroat, as he took a crumpled sausage roll from the lining of his hat and dusted it carefully, “that you are going to speak this afternoon, so I thought I’d knock off early and come along. I’ve got a very good job now, you know. I’m driving one of those whisky carts. You know, the old-fashioned, fancy-dress turn-outs, painted blue, that one sees about the streets. Suits me down to the ground, and quite a nice little screw, too—three quid a week—that’s not at all bad really, you know, considering I’m seventy-three. I did think of going on the stage at one time, but they’ve lowered the age limit for peers to sixty-five, and I can’t pass for that, you know, not even with make-up. Is that your adopted daughter up there in the gallery? Yes, I suppose it must be. She’s worth a nice little fortune to you, I’ll be bound.”

Lord Stroat was only the forerunner of a great mob of his fellow-peers who now began to fill the House. The Lord Chancellor gasped and raised his tufted eyebrows. What could be the reason, he wondered, for such a remarkable attendance. There were, moreover, a number of faces which he had never before set eyes on—certainly not during his tenure of the woolsack. It looked as if somebody had been combing the backwoods, and as he noticed that each new arrival said a few words to Lord Cadwallow, before sitting¹ down, he suspected that old gentleman of having something to do with it. He gave a deep sigh for he had been praying that no one else would arrive and that the House might be

169

adjourned. Now it seemed likely that the debate would last several hours.

• • • • •

The fact was that the Lords Chargehead and Bolus had been very busy that afternoon: and their business had been so singular that it is worthy of notice. Determined that their old friend Cadwallow should have a sympathetic audience for his Maiden Speech, they set out, immediately after the King had finished, to enlist a band of peers on whose applause and support they could rely. To persons unacquainted with the two noblemen it seems, no doubt, utterly unnecessary that they should scour London for

peers when, that very morning, they had such an assembly of first-class material ready to hand. But Chargehead and Bolus disapproved strongly of the type of peer which was represented on occasions of public ceremony. As Bolus guided his steam driven motor-car (model 1906) past the Horse Guards Parade he said to his friend, "We don't want any of these damned Press lords and Jew lords and Law lords and War lords, such as the House was filled with this morning. We want the right sort—people like ourselves and like Cadwallow—people who know how to behave—not a lot of black men and blackguards."

They began their round-up with the clubs. They woke the sleeping peers, and, with the help of waiters and hall porters, lifted them bodily from their armchairs. They shouted down the ear-trumpets of the nearly deaf, they chalked the message on the wall for those who were past hearing a sound, they arranged for a char-a-banc to transport those who

170

had lost the use of their legs. Relentlessly they chivvied their fellow members from one end of Pall Mall up St. James's Street, to the other end of Piccadilly with shouts of, "Come and hear Cadwallow's Maiden Speech." Then, when the clubs had been dealt with, they turned their attention to the shops. They enlisted Lord Colon outside his wine-merchants' business in Davies Street, they dragged the Earl of Monster from his licensed premises in Berkeley Square, they snatched up the Duke of Cæcum, and left a boy to mind his sweet shop in Burlington Gardens. They recognised Lord Adder, fulfilling his duties as the commissionaire of a famous Oxford Street Store, and forcibly pressed him into service. Catching sight of Lord Stroat driving his van they bade him go straight to the House and inform Cadwallow they were on their way. At that moment the Duke, who was by now as enthusiastic as any of them, suddenly slapped his thigh. "By God," he said, "we've forgotten the Labour Exchanges. There's a score or more, that I know for certain are looking for jobs and trying to draw the dole. We must get them at all costs." So off they went again and captured Lord Sacrum, just as he was being offered work as a plumber, and Lord Breech who was flourishing a card marked, "generally incompetent for anything except the simplest manual labour." The dole-drawers promised to come as soon as they had been paid their money. "I'm with you in a few minutes," yelled the Marquess of Buttock, as he sneaked

up two places in the queue. "Just let me collect my seventeen and sixpence."

171

"And that ought to do, I think," announced Bolus. "We've got nearly ninety by now. If they all turn up it will be a record House; and there are bound to be some of the regulars, anyway."

"Have we time to run down to Carey Street? We shall certainly find one or two there."

"No, Chargehead, we haven't, and, besides, the bankruptcy court these days is nothing like what it used to be. They're letting in absolutely the wrong type of man. Come along, now! We must be at the House in ten minutes."

• • • • •

An air of splendour, sufficiently faded to be melancholy, and sufficiently pompous to be satisfying, reigns in the rose and gold coloured interior of the House of Lords. Gazing down on the ranks of nodding bald heads which gleamed with reflected light from above, Bill felt she ought to experience some sensation of awe, but it was impossible. Her eyes opened wide and her lips trembled with laughter as she watched the members entering the House. Not even in America—and that was saying a good deal—had she seen such a collection of eccentricities. The way they walked was so astonishing! Some tottered forward perilously, as if the next step would bring them tumbling to their knees; some slouched vacantly, heads hung low and eyes half closed, waking up to shout and curse as they tripped over the benches and each other's heels; some advanced after the manner of clock-work toys, in paralytic jerks, and muttered to themselves as they moved. Nearly all of these, as befitted the friends of Lord Cadwallow, were elderly; but there was also a fair

172

sprinkling of the younger set, some of whom, she noticed, looked half-starved and one or two had no collars.

"A pity, a great pity, your father is so incompetent," the Macgillivray remarked, "if he'd only thought of writing to his friends in the country he'd have got a really prize collection."

"But surely, Macgillivray, you couldn't expect anything more fantastic than the crowd he has got here already."

“Oh, couldn’t you indeed! You should just see some, my dear Bill. You have no idea! The indescribable dottiness of them! And particularly the Irish peers! Why, there are two I know who are covered with hair all over—they rattle when they walk like sheep! And as for the Welsh—good Lord! There’s old Morgedda—he and his whole family have all got choreomania. Can’t stop dancing and singing all over the place. Came to see me once, all ten of them. They danced into the house, hand in hand, upset everything. Now if I’d been arranging this afternoon’s performance, I should have gone round digging out peers from all the ramshackle hovels in the British Isles; then I should have tried the asylums and private nursing homes and finally the clubs and casual wards. This lot down below all live in London.” He leant forward and peered for several seconds at the floor of the House. “Yes, there is most of the usual political bunch. There’s Farmyore, he’s going to move the Address, and young Schnorrer, who’ll second it. They’re both Socialists, of course. After that your father speaks. He has no right to, of course, it ought to be the Leader of

173

the Opposition in the House of Lords—but Chargehead has seen to that, he’s persuaded the Tones that Cadwallow will be a very valuable acquisition to the party now that you’ve made all this money for him. Ssh now—the fun is going to begin.”

Lord Farmyore, who was one of the promising young men of the Labour Party in the House of Lords, rose to his feet as smartly as the infirmities of his sixty-nine years would permit, and moved the adoption of the King’s Speech. He was seconded by Lord Schnorrer. Lord Schnorrer was not popular with the more reactionary section. He had bought his title out of the proceeds of some highly successful dealings in manure, both artificial and natural, and after being black-balled at no less than twenty-seven clubs, had transferred his allegiance to the Socialist party in a fit of pique. His appearance that afternoon was the signal for a storm of hisses, cat-calls, and abuses from the friends of Cadwallow. “I protest,” shouted the Duke of Cæcum, “it is an insult to His Majesty that this Hebrew dung-dealer should be allowed to second the Address.” “A pogrom, a pogrom,” screamed the Marquess of Buttock. “Kill the Jews and save England,” bellowed Colon. The Lord Chancellor frowned severely on those responsible for the disturbance. The parliamentary reporters sat up and leant forward—

whatever was this, a scene in the House of Lords! Presently the uproar subsided and Lord Schnorrer was allowed to finish his speech.

Slowly, and with infinite care, Lord Cadwallow rose to his feet, testing both legs to make sure they would bear his weight. One or two members who had

174

fallen asleep were nudged by their neighbours—and then complete silence filled the House.

“This is the first time,” he began, “that I have even been allowed to speak in public at all, much less to address that assembly which plays the prominent part in guiding the affairs of the nation—for, of course, nobody pays any attention to that vulgar rabble in the other place, at least, I hope they don’t. Nevertheless, I will not tell you that I am unaccustomed to public speaking. It would be a lie, because, for some months past, I have been practising with my bedroom furniture in the rôle of audience. Now I believe it is the tradition of this House that, on the occasion of the discussion of the King’s Speech, the first Opposition speaker should congratulate the members of the Government on proposing and seconding the Address to His Majesty the King in return for his speech. I intend to depart from that tradition. I do not consider either Lord Farmyore or Lord Schnorrer fit persons to propose or second an Address to His Majesty. How, therefore, can I congratulate them? I am sure that if His Majesty were allowed a say in the matter he would not wish to have anything to do with them.

“All of this, however, is somewhat beside the point. Owing to the phenomenal success of my adopted daughter, whom you can see in the gallery with the rest of my family—incidentally the person sitting next her, and wearing a somewhat noticeable hat, is my wife—I repeat, owing to the phenomenal success of my adopted daughter in the boxing ring, I have now sufficient means at my disposal to enable me to fill that position in the land which is mine by

175

right of inheritance. You may take it, then, for all practical purposes, that I have become a figure of public importance. Now the first duty of a public figure is to make known his opinions to the public. And no doubt that is the reason why His Majesty the King wrote to me a few days ago desiring me

to give my counsel on certain weighty affairs which he outlined in his speech this morning. And now I have a confession to make. I am, as many of my friends here to-day are aware, a trifle deaf. This morning I was sitting rather far back and unfortunately missed very nearly the whole of what His Majesty had to tell us. I had intended to spend the afternoon listening to my butler while he read aloud to me the account given in the evening papers. Alas, I fell asleep soon after luncheon."

At this point there were loud shouds of, "Sit down—shut up—this is intolerable—mocking the dignity of the House—irrelevant nonsense——" from the regular politicians; but they were immediately drowned by encouraging cries from Cadwallow's supporters, who yelled, "Go on, Cadwallow—we're listening—don't worry about what you say, just go on speaking—you shall have a fair hearing—we're with you!"

For a moment it seemed as if Lord Cadwallow was going to be overcome by the confusion until he caught his wife's eye looking stonily down on him. Recovering himself with an effort, he raised both hands above his head and continued as follows:

"I do remember, however, that His Majesty had something to say about India and I propose, therefore, to give you a brief summary of my own method

176

of dealing with the situation out there. The first thing to do with India is to get rid of the Indians, always assuming, of course, that such people exist, for I myself have never seen an Indian, and the only people I have ever met who have been in India are English. Still, I suppose we can take it that there are Indians. And if there are they must be got rid of. 'If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out ...' etcetera. The Indians are being most remarkably offensive, therefore they must be removed. Why nobody has thought of this extremely simple way of solving a tiresome problem, I cannot imagine. Did I hear somebody remark that there were rather a lot of Indians? Well, all the more reason for them being removed. Where to? Why, the sea, of course! I read a book the other day which was all about the sea; it said there was room for every one in it. Besides I daresay a good many Indians can swim. If not, they could easily be taught. It wouldn't matter in the slightest where they swam to provided they didn't swim here.

"But supposing it is not possible to handle the situation in the way I have suggested—for who knows what inefficiencies on the part of

executive officers, what insensate prejudices, such, for instance, as a refusal on the part of the Indians, themselves, to be driven out of their own country, may not arise to the detriment of this simple and attractive plan. If, then, it should not be possible, I suggest that we sever our connection with India altogether. I cannot myself see what profit there is to be got from the place. I personally dislike curry and I have never been able to eat rice

177

Those who imagine that such a withdrawal would result in loss of world prestige can set their minds at rest. Other countries would be the first to congratulate us on our good sense and the value of the pound sterling would rise in consequence. The only disadvantage to this second plan, which I have suggested, is how to dispose of the English at present in India. It is quite out of the question, besides being manifestly unfair to this already over-populated island, to allow them to come back here again. One of the very rare examples of English tact is the way in which we have always sent our undesirables abroad and have at the same time acclaimed them as heroes and Empire-builders. But there is no longer any need to keep up that pretence. Let us, then, sell them at the highest possible price, as slaves to the Indians. I am sure they would be delighted.”

Here Lord Cadwallow paused to sip a glass of water and crane his head to catch the loud and prolonged applause which echoed through the House.

“I have dealt with India first,” he continued, “because for some inexplicable reason, although I have never seen the place, its problems have always exercised a peculiar fascination for me. Now, turning to the more perplexing questions of what are called Home Affairs, I would ask you to be so good as to listen to me for a few moments on the question of education. I am told His Majesty laid particular stress on this. Well, I cannot understand all the fuss. Why should any one want to be educated? Why should any one want education? I never had any education to speak of, but I made the great mistake of sending my two sons and two daughters

178

to schools and universities. And fine failures they’ve made of themselves. You can see them up there in the gallery. Now my adopted daughter, on the other hand, never went to either a school or a university, and yet in less than a year she has made over a quarter of a million pounds without any assistance from anybody. I must not allow my judgment to be swayed by

particular examples. But whoever heard of an educated man rising from the bottom rung of the ladder? The unreasoning petulance of the lower orders in their clamour for what they consider to be their rights, I find most irritating, and I feel sure it is only His Majesty's kind heart which makes him worry his head over the matter, and, of course, we respect him for it. But whatever is the use of a kind heart in these days? Kind hearts are not worth more than coronets. You can pawn a coronet—I have pawned mine many a time and so, I daresay, have most of you—but what can you do with a kind heart? Whatever happens, don't educate anybody free of charge. A tax on schools and schoolmasters should be one of the first acts of any government. If people want to indulge in these ridiculous fancies let them pay, and pay through the nose. I remember the famous Doctor Arnold telling me, when I was a boy, a very apposite little rhyme on the subject. You must excuse me when I hum two of the words as they are hardly fit for your ears. This is how it went:—

'Free education's a gift to the poor,
It raises them out of the gutter,
It teaches the boys to write m-m-m on the door,
And the girls to write m-m-m-m on the shutter.' "

179

Once again Lord Cadwallow paused to watch the effect of his speech on his audience. The acclamation from his supporters was now so violent that it completely drowned all protests. As he was resuming his discourse Lord Chargehead passed him a note. The old gentleman read it, frowned severely, and then raised his hand.

"I have just been informed that there is a possibility of this assembly being broken up, which will obviously entail the cutting short of my speech. I should like, therefore, before I continue, to express a vote of thanks to my adopted daughter—stand up, my dear, so the gentlemen can see you—for it is due to her prowess and generosity that I have been able to take my seat in this House and make this speech to which you are listening—sit down, my dear, sit down, I'm starting again. And now, as an interruption seems imminent, I shall do the best I can to compress my opinions into a short space."

At this point the uproar was such that Lord Cadwallow took up a megaphone from the seat and the rest of his speech was delivered through it in a loud and penetrating roar.

“I learnt yesterday, which was the first day of my political career, that not only are the Socialists allowed to vote and sit in Parliament but that there is at the present moment a Socialist party in power. No doubt that is news to some of you, and shocking news at that. Obviously, then, it is our duty to cause as much obstruction as we possibly can. The powers of this House have been forcibly lessened of late, and all the more, then, must we make the country realise that we are still a force to be reckoned

180

with. I propose forming a new party to be known as the ‘Peers’ Party.’ It will aim at the eventual restoration of the Feudal System. The unemployment problem will thus be solved, because the unemployed will automatically become the serfs of the hereditary peers of Great Britain _____”

But the rest of Lord Cadwallow’s speech was drowned in confusion. Steadily forcing their way through the press came a number of burly dark blue figures, their red faces hot and anxious. The police. For some minutes Cadwallow’s supporters put up a stout resistance. They formed a ring round their leader and defended him with umbrellas, rolled up newspapers, top hats, and anything else that lay to hand. But the struggle was useless.

“No truncheons, mind you,” said the inspector kindly, “treat them as we did the Suffragettes.” The Duke of Cæcum struck a match and tried to set light to a policeman’s uniform. The policeman put his arm round his waist, and carried him gently towards the doors. “Oh, you would, would you, your Grace,” he said, as the Duke tried to light another match, “now just you be careful—arson is a very serious offence, and if you try it again you’ll be getting into trouble.”

One by one they were hustled out of the House, and in spite of kicks, bites, and scratches, from the frenzied old gentlemen the police were still gentle and considerate.

At last there remained only some twenty peers with Cadwallow in the middle. But amongst them were Chargehead and Bolus, and some of the most desperate spirits in the party, all armed with

181

umbrellas which they kept poking savagely into the faces of the police. From his position of comparative safety in the middle of the ring Lord Cadwallow encouraged his followers by croaking through the megaphone, "We must resist this intolerable outrage on our liberties. Stick to your guns and remember King Charles's head!"

The situation began to look ugly, and the inspector scratched his ear. In the face of such venomous obstinacy it was difficult not to use force and besides the umbrellas were really dangerous. Let the old gentlemen have their frolic by all means, but poking policemen's eyes out was beyond a joke. Then he happened to look up and see the giantess. She was leaning over the gallery shouting at him, "I'd better come down, I think."

"If you will, please miss."

Bill stalked into the House, pushing police and peers out of her path. "Stop all this nonsense at once and go back to your clubs," she said; and the umbrellas were lowered immediately. She reached out and caught Lord Cadwallow by the collar, lifting him over the heads of the police. "Come home at once, how dare you make such an exhibition of yourself—it's all right, inspector, I'll look after him."

"Thank you miss, if you would be so kind—I don't think the others will give us any more trouble now."

And still muttering against the intolerable outrage, Lord Cadwallow was carried out of the House of Lords into a taxi.

CHAPTER XI

THE disturbance in the House of Lords had no immediately serious consequences. By the next morning the members of the new “Peers’ Party” were back at their normal occupations, and, as soon as they had recovered from the physical effects of their encounter with the police, the affair was relegated to the dim recesses of their Edwardian memories. Lord Cadwallow came in for a good deal of ridicule, but it was generally held that the success of his adopted daughter had turned his head—not overstrong at the best of times—and the press continued to regard him as a harmless idiot, always to be encouraged so long as he provided their readers with entertainment. In the higher political and social circles, however, a rumour prevailed that the Macgillivray had engineered the entire performance; and that he was planning to promote new and more startling scenes of chaos and confusion in the future.

As soon as it was certain that no arrests would be made Bill and Sebastian undertook the transportation of the family to the Macgillivray’s house in Dorset. Lord Cadwallow was at first very unwilling to leave London. He pretended his political supporters had need of him. “How can I desert my party in this crisis, I, their leader and founder?” he protested. Whereupon Bill drew him into a corner and gave him a severe talking-to.

“Now look here,” she said, “this buffoonery of yours has gone on quite long enough, and instead

183

of mumbling to yourself, and sulking, as you seem to be doing, you ought to be jolly thankful you’re not in prison for high treason. If it wasn’t that every one knows you are not responsible for your own actions, you would be. But really, now, do try and behave a little better. I don’t like to have to say this, but here have I been turning myself into a circus for you this last year, working day and night, with scarcely ever a moment to myself, and all you do when I come back is to make the most fearful exhibition of yourself and run the risk of getting locked up. It isn’t fair on your family—God only knows they’re mad enough already—and it isn’t fair on the Macgillivray, because he will be held responsible for the whole business. So just you make up your mind to behave yourself and come quietly down to the

country to-morrow. Otherwise you will have to go to one of those private nursing homes for backward and troublesome peers—and you know what *that* means! Your wife was determined to send you to one, only I persuaded her to give you one more chance.”

The old gentleman sat up smartly at this. He said, “Just what I should have expected of her, the intolerable vixen!”

“And there is no use your going on like that,” Bill added severely, “she is perfectly right, and if you say another word I shall refuse to pay for the publication of your *History of Church Furniture*—so, now then!”

“Very well, my dear, of course, if you put it like that, I must bow my head to circumstance; but I did think *you* would have treated me with a little

184

consideration. However, when one gets to my age, I suppose one must expect to be bullied. Very well, then, I will abandon my political career—though under protest, I would have you note.”

As they were all now, more or less, under her control, Bill thought it high time that some provision be made for Phœbe and Atalanta, and their children. Although the family had taken advantage of the Macgillivray’s generosity by ordering everything they needed in his absence, these unfortunate infants had been neglected during the American expedition, and left at Cadwallow House in their perambulators. When Bill spoke to their mothers about it they told her it had never occurred to them to move their offspring elsewhere. “We fed them, of course,” said Phœbe, “and my word, the quantity of plover’s eggs the little creatures devoured! But they seemed quite happy and we thought it best to let them stay where they were.”

They wrinkled their white foreheads for some time until finally Atalanta exclaimed, “I know, we’ll run a boarding-house, not for our friends, you know, but for very respectable people with regular habits. It will be such a good atmosphere for the children, and, besides, it will keep us occupied, and we’ll have a comfortable home ready for our husbands when they come back every evening from the garage.”

Bill was more than doubtful as to the ability of the two sisters even to run a bath without letting it overflow, but against her better judgment she wrote them a cheque for ten thousand pounds and gave them her blessing.

The case of Malahide had next to be considered.

He had heard on reliable authority of a doctor in Helsingfors who claimed to have discovered an infallible treatment for stammering, which consisted of daily immersions in ice cold water, and subjection to all kinds of unexpected alarms. The resultant shock to the system was said to loosen the muscles of the tongue. Anyway, Malahide was very anxious to be allowed to try it, so he, too, was pensioned off for the time being, while Snowdrop changed into chauffeur's uniform and took his place at the wheel of the lorry. When these affairs had been settled they left London.

Bill was vastly relieved to be able to escape from cities and the stares of their inhabitants. This was the first freedom she had been able to enjoy for nearly a year, and she decided to do no training for her fight with Lamb, but simply to relax herself, and rest.

The house was even more peaceful than it had been in January, and so, for that matter, were Lord and Lady Cadwallow. Their stock of high spirits and eccentricities seemed, for the time being, exhausted. Not another word was said about the new "Peers' Party." Lady Cadwallow took to knitting, while her husband sat opposite her in front of the fire with Wycliffe on his knee, busy finishing off his proofs, and discussing the more technical passages with Lightfoot.

The first three days in Dorset Bill spent on her bed, for she was really worn out. She lay at ease, stretching her great limbs, and reviewed the extraordinary events which had happened to her during the year, events which had turned her from a penniless freak into a rich woman, and one of the most

celebrated figures in the world. It astonished her that a venture planned in such a spirit of reckless lunacy should have turned out to be so profitable. Now there was only this one more fight and then she would retire. She might, perhaps, write a few more articles and grant an interview or two, but never again would she exhibit herself for money, or submit to all the discomforts which it entailed. Still, even the tour of America had not been such an intolerable ordeal as she had imagined in the beginning. Every one had been so kind in spite of their curiosity. But then, of course, she had been with her friends all the time. If she had to go alone under the care of managers and publicity agents, she would not have been able to endure it.

Really, it was extremely foolish of people to pay such enormous sums of money merely for looking at her. As for her victories in the ring, they were almost farcical. How could any one expect an ordinary human being to stand up against her for a moment? The boxing giants of the past had all been only slightly beyond the normal proportions. Why, even Camera, the greatest of them all, was no longer than she had been when quite a small child. Poor little wretches! She felt overwhelmingly glad that not one of them had she seriously damaged. Even Evil, whom she had sent flying out of the ring at New York, had only broken a collar bone. It was really very fortunate, for she could not help hitting hard at times.

And now she was going to retire, what would she do? She would begin by building a house with everything the right size, and tall furniture so that ordinary human beings would be able to sit on a level with her, for she

187

was weary of craning her neck to look down, of bending her head, of cramping her legs, and testing the chairs before she sat in them. And what after that? Bill suddenly felt desperately sad. Alone of all the peoples of the earth she had no one of her own species with whom to consort. Every one, she imagined, must think her a monstrosity, that was why they paid to see her. How, indeed, could they think of her as anything else? Even her darling Sebastian must think it, and all the more so, poor lamb, since he was practically a dwarf himself. If only she could marry somebody and have a child—it might perhaps be the right size, and then she would feel easier. But who on earth could be found to love a creature of a different species? What made it so particularly depressing was that she was no different from other people as regards her thoughts and feelings, and yet the fact of her extraordinary size cut her off from the rest of humanity as effectively as if she had been a elephant. There was no use worrying about it, though; she would probably have to spend her life taking care of the family, and to that future she must resign herself. Certainly, they needed taking care of: there was no doubt about that.

But she was not long troubled by these gloomy reflections, and as soon as she was properly rested, she felt stealing over her again her former animal pleasure in the mere fact of existence. Here in the country her hugeness was not nearly so tiresome. She was delighted to be able to stretch her limbs out of doors. A sense of unlimited space and the tall trees which dwarfed her as effectively as she

dwarfed ordinary human beings made her feel thoroughly at home.

The weather was unusually mild for the time of year. For those days the sun looked back on the the earth, and framed the autumn landscape in a sky which at midday was almost as deep and clear as that of summer. No wind blew, and even the sea recovered enough of his former good temper to lap quietly on the white sands. Bill and Sebastian went for long walks through the soft brown woods, their feet pressing over the corpses of fallen leaves. They said only a few words to each other the first day, for some remnants of her depression still lingered in the giantess, and Sebastian was unwilling to break in upon her silence. He was, himself, hushed into a gentle melancholy by the almost morbid stillness of the autumn woods. Moreover, he was suffering from feelings of inferiority, which were exactly the converse of Bill's state of mind. So long as they had been no more than friends the littleness of his stature had not distressed him, but now that he knew his feelings towards her were stronger, he cursed himself for being a dwarf. "She may have told me," he said to himself, "that she doesn't think of me as a pygmy, and, indeed, I have grown an inch this last year, but how can she *really* think of me as anything else? Why, it's all I can do to Keep up with her!" He broke out and gave vent to his irritation with the world and himself by kicking at some orange fungi which clustered over the green bole of a beech-tree.

Slowly they wandered on and the blue evening mist descended on the woods. A very strange pair

they must have looked in the distorting gloom of twilight. A village idiot who saw them was terrified and ran shrieking home, to start the legend of a giantess accompanied by a dwarf who haunted the Macgillivray's coverts.

Bill also sensed that something was troubling Sebastian, but the state of her own feelings prevented her from trying to inquire what it was, and for two days they continued their walks in silence. One evening, as they drew near the house, after a particularly mournful three hours' of wandering, she was just on the point of questioning him when a heavy shower of rain came down. "We must run for it," said Sebastian, and he scampered on ahead. Bill drew level, caught him up and set him on her shoulders. "Twine your legs round my neck and hold tight," she said. "Now then, off we go." And

away she went, crashing through the undergrowth with enormous swinging strides, and leaping easily over the hedges of the fields which separated them from the house.

When they were in and she had put Sebastian down he said, "I am sorry to have been so selfish, Bill, walking all the time. I have been making you hang back at every step. To-morrow I will ride and then, at least, you'll be able to get some exercise."

"Oh, Sebastian!" Bill said, but before she could finish he turned quickly and ran up the stairs.

Next day, after lunch, Sebastian went off to the stables. As he rode back to the house past the garage, he called out to Snowdrop, "Have you seen Miss Bill anywhere?"

"No, massa Sebastian, maybe she's talkin' to

190

some ob de beasts in the Zoo. Miss Bill done become mos' attached to dose animals."

But there were no signs of her at the Zoo, and when he asked at the house, Lightfoot told him Bill had gone out a few minutes ago. "That's strange," he thought, "she said she would be waiting for me." Aloud, he said, "Will you tell her, Lightfoot, if you see her, that I have gone down to ride on the sands?"

That afternoon the sky inland belonged to the rooks, those crumpled old charwomen, tipsy with gin and vociferating of their husbands. As they lurched over the beech trees Sebastian saw their bonnets nodding in the bright blue distance. He rode down the cliff path which led to the sea and looked for the giantess. But she was nowhere to be seen. There was a long stretch of flat sand at the foot of the cliffs on which the Macgillivray's house was built, and Sebastian cantered as far as a large rock. He checked his horse to a walk and then stopped. From behind the rock came the confused sounds of some one sobbing very loudly.

It was Bill. She was lying, an enormous heap, on the sand with her head in her arms, and her bright hair hanging over her face. Near her, on the sand, lay an open book, which looked as if it had been flung down with some violence. Sebastian got off his horse, and hung the reins over a knob of rock. He sat down and gently stroked the giantess's neck with his fingertips.

"What's the matter, Bill? What is it? Tell me!"

Bill looked up, and two huge tears fell down, plop, to darken the sand. "Leave me alone," she wailed.

191

Sebastian went and picked up the book. He saw that it was an edition of *Gulliver's Travels*.

"Was it anything to do with this?"

"Yes, p-partly." Bill was off again in another burst of passionate crying.

It was too much for Sebastian's soft heart, and he began to cry himself. Bill looked up at him, and, magnified by her tears, her eyes seemed as big as saucers.

"What have *you* got to cry about?"

"I'm crying because you are, and because I'm sad too. Oh, please, darling Bill, won't you tell me what's the matter?"

She took the book from his hands and turned the pages until she found the place. "Read that!" she said.

Sebastian saw that it was the passage where Gulliver describes his feelings of repulsion at the sight of the monstrous breast of a Brobdingnagian suckling her child.

"That is how you must think of me," Bill went on. "I've been reading *Gulliver's Travels* for the last two days, and after lunch I came upon that part and it was absolutely too much for me. I suddenly realised what every one, and you in particular, must feel about me."

"I don't, darling, I don't, nor does anybody else, for that matter, but I certainly don't! You're not horrible or monstrous. You're very beautiful, and I love you."

"I don't believe it, Sebastian. You're only saying that to try and comfort me."

"I'm not, Bill. It is true, and I do love you, but

192

I never thought it possible you could love me—wretched little dwarf that I am."

Bill sat up and caught him in her arms. "Do you mean to say that all this time I've been worrying that you couldn't love me because I'm so huge, you've been worrying that I couldn't love you because you are so small? Oh, Sebastian, why didn't you tell me?"

She rocked him to and fro in her arms as if he had been a baby; then kissed him until he could scarcely breathe.

“Darling, I adore you,” Sebastian whispered. “I thought,” he continued some minutes later, “with all those newspapers repeatedly saying how beautiful you were that you were cured, long ago, of your ridiculous obsession that every one thought you a monster. There!” and he bit her neck sharply in his excitement, “even if I am small I can make myself felt.”

“My sweet,” she murmured, “I love you for being small.”

It was quite half an hour before either of them were able to talk sense. Finally Sebastian said, “As soon as you’ve fought Lamb, darling, we’ll get married.

“We will indeed. But there’s one thing. Sebastian, darling, do you mind if we try and have children as soon as possible?”

“Darling, of course not!”

“Well, you see, if I could produce a child which was the ordinary size it would make me happier.”

“Darling, I believe you’re only marrying me because I’m a dwarf and you’re a giantess and you hope the result will be something in between.”

193

“I would marry you,” said Bill, gaily, “even if I knew it would mean that I should be brought to bed of a Utter of elephants.”

“Well, I don’t think you need be afraid of that, anyway.”

“Are you sure you don’t mind in the least my being so enormous?”

“I love you for it, Bill, and I love to see you towering up above me looking so beautiful and all. But are you sure you won’t ever despise me for being so tiny and not being able to keep up with you when you walk? And all the money is yours too, darling, and you’ll be keeping me. Won’t that make you despise me?”

“Of course it won’t. What does it matter whose the money is, and, anyway, you’ve helped me to make it by looking after me and taking care of me wherever we’ve been.”

“I suppose we ought to be going back.” It had been getting dark for some time, but neither of them had noticed it, so intent had they been on each other. Bill got up and brushed the sand from her skirt.

“Good Lord,” Sebastian said, “my horse has disappeared. I suppose we must have bored him.”

“Never mind, darling, you shall ride on my back. You don’t mind my picking you up and carrying you about sometimes when nobody is looking, do you?”

“I love you to, Bill, so long as you don’t think of me as a marmoset, or one of those fishes, amongst whom the males are several times smaller than the females and go about clinging on to them.”

“Now, no more of these heart-searchings about

194

whether I think of you as a parasite and whether you think of me as an elephant. If you are a dwarf and if I am a giantess it is only in keeping with best mythological traditions that we should be together. You told me that yourself almost the first time we met.”

“Anyway, I love you,” was all Sebastian could say.

“And I love you, too, and it makes me very happy, and I feel I am a human being again and not a monster.” Then she set him on her shoulders, and ran back along the beach.

“I was afraid something had happened to you, sir,” said Lightfoot, when he saw them. “Your horse came back without you some time ago.”

“Lightfoot,” said Bill, “we are going to be married.”

“Well, indeed, I am delighted, miss ... allow me to congratulate you, Mister Sebastian, sir, I’ve been hoping this would happen for the last year. I must send a telegram to Mr. Kenneth, the pawnbroker, if you will permit me. And how pleased his lordship will be! This will certainly compensate him for having had to retire from politics so abruptly.”

Lord and Lady Cadwallow were enchanted with the news. The old gentleman saw an opportunity of making a speech. “My deepest congratulations!” he said. “I am vastly relieved that Bill is going to stay in the family. I am sorry for your sake, my dear, that Sebastian does not inherit the title, and I would willingly make you a wedding present of it, together with my robes and coronet, but there are

195

unfortunately some absurd legal restrictions which would prevent me. However, there is always the possibility of something happening to Malahide, and in any case I think it is very unlikely that he will ever marry.”

“Hilary!” said Lady Cadwallow, “I will not have you pretending you are Richard III—be quiet! Bill, I am delighted. It is a pity Sebastian is not more of a size for you, but they say people sometimes continue to grow until quite late in life. At any rate, if you look after him as well as you have looked after his father, he will come to no harm. You won’t find him so troublesome either, as he gets whatever intelligence he possesses from me.”

After tea Bill and Sebastian discussed their plans for the future in more detail. The giantess lay outstretched in front of the fire, and Sebastian knelt beside her head, so that he might look down on her.

Bill said, “It is rather odd that we haven’t heard a word from Titania or the Macgillivray since we’ve been here. I hope nothing awful has happened.”

“I can’t imagine anything, can you?”

“No, but you know how nervous he has been lately, and Titania would never tell us the reason.”

Just then a bell rang. They heard an anxious voice from the hall, the door flew open, and Titania burst into the room. Her clothes were torn and dirty, her hair was disordered, her face was white and strained, with smears of oil all over her cheeks.

“The most awful thing has happened,” she said. “Macgillivray has been put in a lunatic asylum!”

CHAPTER XII

“SIT down, Titania,” said Bill, “and tell us all about it. Sebastian, give her some brandy or something.”

Titania, who was on the verge of tears, collapsed into a chair and drank the glass he gave her at a gulp.

“Thank you, dear,” she said, “I needed that badly. I’ve just driven from London and, on top of everything, the car broke down about forty miles away.”

“What exactly has happened?” Sebastian asked.

“Well, it’s as I told you,”—Titania made a helpless gesture with her hand—“Macgillivray has been shut up in an asylum.”

“Do you know which one?”

“I think so, but I’m not absolutely certain.”

“Hadn’t we better have the whole story from the beginning?” said Bill.

“Well, in the first place,” Titania began, “I may as well tell you that this is what the Macgillivray has been so terrified about ever since we went to America. He always felt it would happen some time or other—there have been two attempts before, you know—and, of course, it is much easier for him to be shut up when the wrong government is in and his cousin, the Home Secretary, is out of office.”

“But who wants to shut him up, Titania? I don’t understand,” Sebastian interrupted.

“Wait a little, Sebastian, I’m coming to that in

197

time. Well, after daddy’s Maiden Speech Macgillivray got very frightened. He kept on saying to me that he would be held responsible for it. I told him I thought he was obsessed with the idea that he was going to be certified and did my best to soothe him. When he saw the line the papers were taking, making such fun of it and all that, he cheered up a good deal and we started seeing about Bill’s fight. We arranged to take the Wembley Stadium next Saturday week, you must have read about that, it’s been in all the papers, and broadcast, and everything.”

“As a matter of fact we haven’t seen any papers since we came here, and there is no wireless set.”

“Oh, well, anyway, we had everything practically settled when Mrs. Bogus rang up to ask us to come to tea with her. Macgillivray didn’t want to go, but I said he might as well as it would be the last time, and we could tell her she must come to the fight, so we went. And, oh, I do wish to God we hadn’t ...” Here Titania burst into tears which trickled through her fingers as she covered her face with her hands.

Sebastian gave her more brandy, while Bill went over to her and put an arm round her shoulders.

“It will be all right, darling, don’t worry,” she said, “we’ll get him out, whatever happens. Just go on with your story as soon as you feel better.”

“What I cannot understand” Sebastian said, “is why, if they were going to shut anybody up, they didn’t choose daddy.”

Titania dried her eyes and continued. “It was a very odd tea-party altogether, and I felt something was wrong as soon as we entered the room. There were Mrs. Bogus, Lady Otolith, the Caretaker’s

198

Daughter, blast her! Two entirely strange dim, slug-faced men who might have been bank-managers; and a fearful brute of an old woman called Dame Alison Tubby—I expect you’ve heard of her, she’s Minister of Health in the new Government, one of those professional nuisances who are always meddling with things they know nothing about. She made a great deal of fuss trying to get your first fight with Heber stopped. Well, when the Bogus introduced us, I couldn’t catch the two men’s names, but she said in a very pregnant tone, ‘Dame Alison, of course, is a J.P.’ I couldn’t see that that meant anything particular at the time, and I don’t think Macgillivray was listening. We had tea, and the atmosphere was very constrained. I noticed that Bogus and Otolith kept on looking at each other and smiling in a very unpleasant manner, and once or twice the Caretaker’s Daughter whispered something to Dame Tubby. Nobody spoke very much except Macgillivray, who had one of his nonsensical fits and started saying the same thing four hundred times and jerking about in his chair. He was terribly nervous, I think, poor darling. As for the two dim men, they said nothing at all. One of them produced a notebook and started scribbling in it rather furtively, so I asked him what he was writing. He looked very guilty and muttered something about how he was just making a note of the time in case he forgot, and, of course, I thought the poor brute was dotty. Well, finally we got up to go and the Bogus said, in the most peculiar voice, how

glad she was to have seen us, and then she said, ‘What a nice conclusive little tea-party it’s been!’ I couldn’t think what on earth she meant, but I saw

199

Lady Otolith and the Caretaker’s Daughter laughing like jackals. I remarked to Macgillivray how very odd it all was and he agreed, but we neither of us thought any more about it.

“The next morning, at about half-past eleven, Macgillivray and I were just coming out of Carlton House Terrace, when a large Daimler, with all its blinds down, snorted up and stopped in front of us. Three men wearing white coats and uniform caps jumped out, caught hold of Macgillivray, dragged him inside and slammed the door before I could say a word. The car started off and I tried to get on the step, but a policeman, who had appeared mysteriously, from nowhere apparently, held me by the arms. He said, ‘I shouldn’t interfere, if I were you, miss, this is a government business.’ I yelled and kicked, but I couldn’t get away. As the car drove off there was a crash of glass and Macgillivray’s head appeared through one of the windows. He screeched at me, ‘Don’t try and follow me, but go and tell my cousin. Fetch Bill and Sebastian.’ Then he disappeared—they must have dragged him in. I turned on the policeman and asked him what the devil he meant by it, and he said he was very sorry, but he had strict instructions from Scotland Yard that he was to be on duty outside Carlton House Terrace that morning, and to see that nobody interfered with some asylum authorities who would be taking away a very troublesome patient. He said that was all he knew about it. I said, ‘How dare they take him to an asylum when he hasn’t even been certified!’ and the policeman said, ‘Oh, but he has been, miss, I understand all

200

that was seen to yesterday!’ Then, of course, it finally dawned on me what was the significance of Bogus’ tea-party. The dim men were two doctors and Dame Alison Tubby was the necessary J.P.

“Well, then I set out in search of Macgillivray’s cousin, the ex-Home Secretary—I don’t know whether you’ve ever met him, Sebastian, but he is the most irritatingly stupid man it is possible to imagine. He was not the least surprised when I told him what happened. All he said was, ‘Yes, I knew it would come sooner or later, and since your father’s Maiden Speech

in the House of Lords I have been expecting it daily. I'm very sorry, I don't see what I can do about it—if I was in office now, it would be another matter. I'm afraid you'll have to wait until we get in again, before you get him out.'

"I lost my temper at that. 'Look here,' I yelled, 'if you don't do something useful at once I shall ring up your aunt in Scotland and then you'll be disinherited.' That made him pull himself together, I can tell you.

" 'Well, what do you want me to do,' he asked.

" 'Find out for me where he has been taken,' I said, 'that's all. I'll get him out soon enough.'

"He thought for a long time, and then he remembered that the Assistant Commissioner of Police had been his fag at school and was under an obligation to him, because, when he had been Home Secretary, he had allowed him to accept bribes without making any fuss, or even extorting the usual thirty-three and a third per cent, commission; so he said he would ring him up and ask him if he could tell him anything. So he picked up the telephone, and as soon as he

201

got through he started off in the most pathetic fashion, you know the sort of thing, 'Look here, Sandy old boy, I've done you one or two good turns in my time and now I want you to do something for me—fact is, my young cousin, Macgillivray, the one who has got all the money, you know, has been put in an asylum and I understand it is one of those political jobs ...' etcetera.

"They went on talking to each other for ages and at last he told me what had happened. It seems that the Cabinet were very upset about the scene in the House of Lords; they were quite convinced that Macgillivray was entirely responsible, and they got the idea into their heads that he was planning to make a real proper nuisance of himself. Apparently different people, whom he had offended by his fantastic tricks, have been wanting to certify Macgillivray for a long time. Sir Charles Otolith and Mr. Bogus, who are both in the Cabinet, insisted that this time there really should be no mistake about it, and they said they would undertake to do the job themselves. They passed on the responsibility to their wives and Dame Alison Tubby as Minister of Health, who were all only too delighted, and the Caretaker's Daughter, hearing from her father what was in the wind, joined in partly out of sheer spite, and partly, I imagine, because she thinks

she can force Macgillivray to marry her in exchange for his freedom. They roped in two obscure medical officers from the Board of Health and Dame Alison Tubby, who is so malevolent that the other day she certified her own son. Some of the Cabinet thought that Daddy should be certified as well, but the opinion of the

202

majority was that he would be quite harmless once the disrupting influence of Macgillivray was removed.”

“And where have they taken him?” asked Sebastian.

“Well, the Assistant Commissioner said it would almost certainly be a private asylum, which Dame Alison has an interest in and where she sent her own son. It’s not far from Maidenhead—a large red house, called ‘Morgan’s Rest.’ We shall be able to find it easily enough.

“As soon as I found out all I could I got hold of one of Macgillivray’s cars and came roaring down here.”

“We’d better not waste any time,” said Bill. “We’ll go there at once.”

“Yes, but how are we going to get him out?” asked Titania.

“I shall break the place down,” Bill answered.

“Yes, but wait a minute,” put in Sebastian. “What are we going to do with him when we’ve got him out. After all, I suppose they were real doctors, and that the certification was carried out in accordance with all the formalities. What legal right have we to stop them shutting him up again even if we do get him out?”

“Oh, don’t let’s worry about that, Sebastian, let’s get him out first. Besides if we can keep him out for a fortnight, they can’t shut him up again until he has been re-certified. And we can get two mental specialists and a proper respectable J.P. to pronounce him absolutely sane. After all, even if the government is at the back of this, they have acted in a highly unconstitutional manner.”

203

“It doesn’t look as if your fight will take place, Bill.”

“I don’t see why it shouldn’t. We can appeal to the press for fair play for ourselves and the public—why should people be robbed of their harmless entertainment simply on account of the caprice of a weak government controlled from behind the scenes by these spiteful harpies. Those women

have ruled the country long enough.” Bill became quite eloquent with indignation.

“Very well, then,” said Sebastian, “we will have something to eat and be off. Shall we be able to find the place all right, Titania?”

“I think so. They told me more or less where it was. Will we go in the car or the lorry? the car will take much less time.”

“I am afraid,” said Bill, “it will have to be the lorry—there simply is not room for me in the car. I’ll tell Snowdrop to get ready at once.”

Lord Cadwallow came in to find them cutting sandwiches and wrapping up champagne bottles. They told him what had happened, and he immediately suggested that they should enlist the services of the new Peers’ Party, whereupon his daughter snapped at him, “It’s characteristically idiotic of you to say that, particularly when you and your friends and the ridiculous exhibition you made of yourselves are entirely responsible for the whole affair.”

“Very well, my dear, have it your own way,” he replied meekly, “but I still affirm that if I had been allowed to continue my political career there would be no necessity for any of this.

204

I think the least you can do is to take me with you.”

“I think not,” said Bill, firmly, “we have quite enough trouble already without taking any with us. You stay here and look after yourself.”

“And tell Mummy I have taken her hot-water bottle,” put in Titania.

Snowdrop stood ready at the door. He had borrowed, for the occasion, a fur coat of the Macgillivray’s which was far too small for him and threatened to burst at any moment.

“De avengin’ chariot ob de Lord am waiting on yo, Miss Bill,” he said grinning, “an’ ah got mall razor good an’ sharp in case ob necessity.”

A few minutes later the lorry was tearing up the road through the woods. Sebastian, who was sitting in Bill’s lap, remarked, “At any rate, this is tremendously exciting. Incidentally, we’ve forgotten to tell you, Titania, that we’re engaged.”

“I thought you would,” she answered, “and as soon as Macgillivray has been extricated he is going to marry me. I can’t have any more of this sort of thing going on.”

And away they went, to the accompaniment of fierce blasts on the horn and the singing of Snowdrop, into the night, regardless of what might be in

store for them.

205

CHAPTER XIII

MEANWHILE, what of the Macgillivray? We may resume his adventures from the moment when his head was pulled back through the window of the car as he shouted parting instructions to Titania.

The three white-coated attendants sat firmly on top of him, pressing him down so that he was forced to take a mouthful of the hair mat which covered the floor. They all of them appeared to be in extremely high spirits.

“Now, look here, sir,” said number one, “are you going to come quietly or shall we just drop in at your tailor’s and get you fitted for a nice strait-waistcoat?”

“That’s not the way to talk to the gentleman!” said number two, “you don’t want to mention those things, or he’ll think he is being taken to a lunatic asylum.”

The others seemed to consider this a great joke for they burst into loud roars of laughter.

“Lunatic asylum, indeed!” chuckled number three, “what an idea! Why, sir, we’re going to have lunch in a lovely old-world country house, where you’ll find the most charming set of ladies and gentlemen, who’ll be as kind and hospitable to you, and take you under their wing, as if you was their own son, indeed they will.”

“If you will let me get up,” said the Macgillivray. “I’ll promise not to try and escape, but I see no reason why I should be more uncomfortable than is absolutely necessary.”

206

“Quite right, sir, that is very accommodating of you,” said number one. “Now you two sit one on each side, arm in arm with him, and I’ll sit here just opposite. That’s the way, now we’re all snug.”

The Macgillivray sat in silence and considered his position. He felt sure he was right in telling Titania not to follow him, for they were bound to have taken precautions against it. Presently number two confirmed this.

“I’m sorry we couldn’t take your young lady along with us, sir, but you see she wasn’t asked to the party. I hope she’ll save herself the trouble of trying to crash in, though, because I’m afraid she’ll never find the way.”

This was slightly reassuring. Titania, at any rate, had not been sacrificed. If only his cousin could find out where the asylum was, and if Titania could get hold of Bill, there was a chance of escape. Anyway there was no harm in trying the effect of a bribe, so he said, "Is there any hope of inducing you to let me go? I am not exactly a poor man ..."

"Ah, we were expecting something of this sort, sir," answered number one, brightly, "but I'm afraid it's no go, not even if you was to offer us all the tea in China—it isn't that we are incorruptible, sir, but it's as much as our lives are worth."

"I'll give you a blank cheque ..."

"No, sir, we daren't do it, the risks are too great—isn't that so, you chaps?"

"Much too great!" the other two agreed, and they wagged their heads in unison.

"I suppose," the Macgillivray went on, "that Mrs. Bogus and Lady Otolith are at the back of this?"

207

"Well, sir, that's hardly for us to say, but I shouldn't be surprised if they didn't have something to do with it."

"And that tea-party yesterday was to certify me?"

"We don't know about any tea-party, sir, but we were told that the gentleman we were to drive down to the country—meaning you, sir—had only been pronounced fit to travel yesterday afternoon."

"I wish you would stop these ridiculous attempts at old-fashioned humour," the Macgillivray said sharply. "I find them very tedious. Won't you even tell me where I am being taken?"

"Now whatever would you be wanting to know that for," said number two, "haven't I been telling you we're going to a nice house in the country for lunch with a charming set of people?"

"Oh, shut up!" said the Macgillivray.

The Daimler sailed on its way with all the smooth pomposity of its tribe and the three attendants began exchanging memories of past experiences. "Do you remember the time we took the Marquess of Blackball away in the middle of a shareholders' meeting?" began number one.

"I should think I do—just after he'd read his report and they all yelled—'Certify him! Certify him!'—rather blasphemous, I thought, myself. But

there was no doubt about the Duke's not being all there. He'd have been a good one for this new Peers' Party, he would."

"What's happened to him?"

"Oh, didn't you hear? He was walking in the grounds at Morgan's Rest when he saw a swarm of

208

bees on a tree. Damn me, if the old fool didn't eat 'em. He got stung to death and suffocated, of course. I remember his last words as we put the waistcoat on him, for he was kicking about a good deal, were, 'Best caviare I've ever tasted.' "

"I must say I like 'em to be really insane," whispered number two. "It's not half such fun when they are like this gentleman here, certified for political reasons."

"Yes, indeed. Do you remember old Bishop Bowie? He gave us a fine run for our money."

"What did he do? I think that must have been before my time."

"Well, he was always peculiar, as you might say, but he never actually had an outbreak until the day he preached a sermon in Saint Paul's Cathedral. Swell congregation and everything. He started off with a flood of the most awful language you ever heard, and then he began throwing lumps of mud all over the church. Oh, it caused a fine sensation when it happened."

"It's always the clergy who act violent when they go dotty. I remember poor Canon Sainsbury, who was put away in '86. He went out one night and set fire to a sheep, which had strayed into the Cathedral close, and danced round it bawling out that it was an acceptable burnt offering. They asked him what he done it for and all he said was, 'I thought it was my son!' "

The Macgillivray saw that they were not watching him very closely, and decided that if he got a chance and the car slowed down, he would make a dash for the door. He listened carefully to the beat of the

209

engine. Presently he heard the gears change and realised that they were climbing a hill. Slower and slower the car seemed to be going. He waited to see if there was another change down. Yes, they were in second gear now, and he thought he would risk it. He flung out both his elbows, hitting the

faces of the two on either side of him, and sprung for the door. He caught the handle, turned it, and was in the act of springing out when his legs were firmly grasped from behind. He pitched forward and hung out perilously, his face within a few inches of the road, and dust swirling round his head. But it was no use. He was dragged in and forced down on the back seat. He saw then that number two's nose was bleeding and that number three was tenderly massaging an eye.

"Oh, you would, would you, sir!" number one exclaimed reproachfully. "After what you promised and all! Now I consider that downright dishonourable, I do, indeed. I'm afraid we shall have to put you in the waistcoat, sir, I'm afraid so."

From under the seat one of them produced a contrivance of stiff canvas and leather straps. They forced the Macgillivray's arms through the holes and laced him up tightly at the back. It was now utterly impossible for him to move any part of himself except his feet, and as soon as the waistcoat was on, even these were strapped together, in order, as his captor expressed it, "to guard against high spirits."

"There," said number one, when the Macgillivray was completely trussed, "you won't be able to give us any more trouble. I'm sorry to have to put a

210

gentleman like you to such indignity, but you brought it on yourself, you know, sir."

"Well," said number three, when they had settled themselves again, "as I was just going to say, things aren't what they were in our business. It's not nearly so easy to get people certified as it used to be. I remember the time when it was only a question of the least little bit of eccentricity, and in you went! But nowadays they seem frightened of shutting them up."

"Yes, it's the doctors who are the cowards," said number one, contemptuously, "they're afraid of their reputations, and, of course, you know, with all the aristocracy going bankrupt, there isn't the money in it there used to be. You don't get young gentlemen coming to you and saying, 'Will you certify my mother and put her in an asylum for ten thousand?' because it simply isn't worth their while."

"My word, there used to be some doctors before the war," said number three, "they weren't afraid. Sir Gratton Glower—do you remember him?—in the year 1906 he was responsible for the certification of five hundred and

seventy-seven persons, male and female, and I don't think there was more than ten of them who wasn't as sane as you or I. He retired from practice the next year, and died of drink a few months afterwards, poor chap. Then there was the two Doctor Boyds—twin brothers, they were, who worked together. They had a wonderful way of handling the patients. They used to get the poor devils so confused, that, after half an hour, they didn't know whether they was mad or sane. They had

211

their consulting room rigged up like something out of a nightmare—you never saw such a place. They came to grief in the end, though, did it once too often. A great pity, and a great loss to the profession. They were splendid young fellows, both of them. But here we are; and now, sir, we shall have to hand you over to Doctor Caulkhirst.”

The car had stopped. They undid the strap from the Macgillivray's ankles and helped him out. He saw a large red and yellow brick building, in the mock Gothic style, whose façade was perforated by a large number of small narrow windows, heavily barred. It was situated, so far as he could judge, in a valley, and was surrounded by a vast forest of monkey-puzzle trees. An elderly man with a dirty grey face, wearing a greenish frock coat, was standing at the door talking to a couple of attendants. He came forward and inspected the Macgillivray.

“So you're the new patient, are you?” he said. “I've heard a lot about you. I'm Doctor Caulkhirst, but it is a waste of breath telling you that, because you probably imagine I'm Paul Robeson or Lady Astor, or somebody. We'll take you to your room at once.”

“Shall we leave his waistcoat on, doctor?” asked one of the attendants.

“Of course you'll leave it on, whatever next! Take him to number thirteen immediately.” They marched their patient up a flight of stairs and along a corridor. The Macgillivray felt quite helpless. “Really, this is too absurd,” he protested, “I am not mad and there will be serious trouble over this business.”

212

“Humph,” grunted the doctor, “shamming sane, are you? There's no doubt about it, you're a very dangerous case, my man, and cunning too, like all lunatics. I think we'd better have you under observation.”

A door was thrown open and the Macgillivray found himself in a small room whose furniture consisted of an iron bedstead which was clamped to the floor, a wooden stool, which was chained to one of the legs of the bedstead, and a rubber basin, half-full of dirty water. "You don't mean to say I'm going to be left in here!" he exclaimed, "it isn't fit for a pig!"

"Why not?" said Dr. Caulkhirst, "what's the matter with it? It's good enough for a madman, isn't it? Besides, you probably think it's a palace or the Ritz Hotel, or somewhere. You'll have some food brought up to you later. Good afternoon."

Left to himself, the Macgillivray sat down on the bedstead, as far as the strait-waistcoat would permit him, and meditated upon his intolerable situation. It was quite useless for him to think of escaping by himself. To begin with, the waistcoat would not allow him to move his arms. Apart from that, the door was of thick oak, and even if he could manage to break through the window bars, the opening itself was too narrow to let him through. There was nothing for it but to sit still and pray that Titania would bring the giantess to his rescue. He abandoned himself to heaping curses upon the heads of the government, Lady Otolith, Mrs. Bogus, the Caretaker's Daughter, and Dame Alison Tubby.

213

The time went on and he felt hungry. It was bitterly cold and the room grew darker and darker. Presently footsteps sounded in the corridor. The door opened and in came the two attendants. They had a third figure between them.

"Here's company for you," said one, "it's strictly against regulations, of course, but his room has been flooded out by a burst pipe and there's nowhere else to put him." With that they slammed the door and locked it. The figure advanced stiffly towards the Macgillivray, and he saw that it was that of a young man, encased like himself in a strait-waistcoat.

"Good evening," he said, "I suppose you're not a lunatic?"

"No such luck. I wish I was. You've only just arrived, haven't you?"

"Yes, I was brought down here to-day. My name is the Macgillivray of Ballas."

"Oh yes. I've heard my mother speak of you. Mine is Theobald Tubby."

"What! Not any relation to that fearful brute, Dame Alison Tubby?"

"Yes. I'm her son. She sent me here, as a matter of fact."

"When?"

“About six months ago, I think it was. She lost her temper with me because I wouldn’t help canvass for her for the election. And then she became obsessed with the idea that I was mad, and finally she had me certified—she is a J.P., you know, and Minister of Health into the bargain.”

“I should think I do know—go on.”

214

“Well, that’s all there is to it. I was brought down here, and here I’ve been ever since.”

“Well, if it’s any consolation to you,” said the Macgillivray, “she helped to certify me.” And he gave him an account of everything that happened.

“Exactly what I should have expected of her, the old sow,” was Master Tubby’s comment when he had finished.

The Macgillivray was on the point of telling him it was possible they would be set free that evening when it occurred to him that he might be a spy, so he asked instead, “Who else is here? Are there any real lunatics?”

“There are quite a few genuine mad people, I believe, but there are also a lot who have been put away for political reasons like you, and on account of spite like me. You see, since this filthy government got in, and my mother was made Minister of Health, she has done nothing but try and certify all the people who disagreed with her. It really is outrageous.”

“What about singing some hymns?” the Macgillivray suggested, “it will keep us occupied, and you never know, it might annoy somebody.”

“We could do that. I’m afraid we’ll find our strait-waistcoats rather cramping for the lungs.”

“Yes, I suppose we shall. Still we can try. Do they make you wear them all the time?”

“No, but I attacked the doctor yesterday, and managed to pull his nose, so I’ve been classed as dangerous again.”

They sang “Our Blest Redeemer,” “The Saints of God,” and “There is a Green Hill Far Away.”

215

Then they improvised a chant about Dame Alison which began—“Dame Alison Tubby has got black legs——” but they had got no further than the first line when somebody thumped loudly on the door and a harsh voice shouted, “If you don’t stop that filthy row at once you’ll have gags put in your mouths!”

“This is a remarkably unpleasant asylum,” said the Macgillivray.

“It is, it’s bloody! You wait until you’ve been here as long as I have. I really am almost mad now.”

“How many attendants and people are there?”

“I don’t know exactly. I don’t think very many.”

Some time later the door was again opened, and a man appeared with a tray and an electric torch.

“I’ve brought you something to eat after all,” he said. “I’m sorry if we was a little harsh just now, but the fact is there’s been a very unfortunate occurrence this evening. The Princess Fitzrovia has escaped.”

“Who is she?”

“She is one of our oldest patients. Fairly raving, too, I can tell you. Thinks she’s a public house—always saying, ‘The bar’s closed, I tell you, it’s closed.’ My mate took her out for her exercise this afternoon and she bit him in the leg as he was opening the garden gate for her and got clean away over a wall. The doctor is in an awful state about it. I’m afraid you gentlemen will have to share this room for to-night. We’ll see if we can’t manage something better for you in the morning. I’ll put your dinner on the floor here.”

“But how on earth are we going to eat it in these waistcoats? We can’t even use our arms!”

216

“Goodness me, I never thought of that—nor you can! Well, I’ll undo the straps, and then you can struggle out of them yourselves; before you’ve time to knock me down I shall be out of the door. I shouldn’t waste any energy trying to escape because it’s impossible. Good-night. I’ll leave the torch for you to eat by.”

“This is a little better,” said the Macgillivray as they extricated themselves. “Let me see, is that my overcoat in the corner? There ought to be a flask of brandy in that. Good!”

They ate their supper which consisted of cold boiled beef with pickled cabbage, and divided the brandy between them. Then they tossed for who should have the bed. The Macgillivray lost. He rolled up his overcoat to serve as a pillow, and being drowsy with brandy, and, worn by the nervous strain of the day, he soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIV

SEBASTIAN woke up and climbed carefully out of Bill's lap so as not to disturb her. Stepping over Titania, he made his way to the front of the lorry. It was raining hard, he observed, and they were passing through a town. "Wherever are we, Snowdrop?" he inquired.

"Dis heah town is Reading, Massa Sebastian."

"What's the time?"

"Pas' two o'clock, sah. De engine done misbehaved itself an' ah had to stop in Aldershot, but you was all sleeping sound."

217

"Well, you'd better stop just outside Maidenhead."

Sebastian went back and woke Bill. "We're nearly there," he told her.

"Are we, darling? Well, we'd better drink some champagne, I should think. You might open a couple of bottles and give Snowdrop some. I'll rouse Titania."

They drank the champagne and ate their sandwiches. Presently Snowdrop stopped the car on the top of a hill, and, looking down, they saw Maidenhead, a dark straggling blot, below them.

"And now," Bill said, "what are we going to do exactly. Titania, are you quite certain where this house is?"

"Yes, we go towards Henley, and then take a turning to the right, and we should find some lodge gates on our left."

"It sounds rather vague. You'll have to sit in front with Snowdrop and tell him. We had better drive past the gates and find a suitable place to leave the car."

"And then what?" Sebastian asked.

"Then we go and break up the asylum, of course, stupid, what else should we do?"

"How are we going to find Macgillivray?"

"We'll simply go on opening all the doors until we find him. I'm not going to stand any nonsense."

"But suppose they shoot you, darling."

"Don't be absurd, my angel. This isn't America. Here, give me some more of that champagne, I'm thirsty."

They drove on in silence. Presently Titania said,

218

“This is where we turn off, I think. No, stop, Snowdrop! There is somebody coming, we’ll ask them.”

A dark figure was walking towards them, swaying from side to side of the road. It was revealed, as it came within range of the headlights, to be an old lady in a long black dress. Her hair was streaming down her back, her face was scratched and splashed with mud; she was minus one shoe; yet somehow she managed to impress them with a strong sense of her dignity. Sebastian jumped down into the road. “Excuse me,” he began, “but can you tell me——”

“No, young man, certainly not. It’s long after hours. The bar’s closed. Time, gentlemen, please. Arthur, tell that gentleman with the bagpipes in his waistcoat pocket to hurry up and finish his glass. If you want a drink you must go to the ‘White Swan’ in Covent Garden, where they have special times for the porters. Come now, respect the law even if it is administered by a pack of mountebanks!”

“But I don’t want a drink, I only want to know where I can find a house _____”

“Well, I am a house, and a very respectable one. I’d have you know, young man, that there’s never been any trouble about my licence since I was first opened. Bar’s closed. Hurry up, please, it’s past time!” She stood in the middle of the road blinking at the headlights. Sebastian returned to the lorry. “It’s hopeless,” he said, “she’s raving mad and seems to think she’s a public house.”

“Obviously she’s escaped from the asylum,” said Titania, “here, let me talk to her.” And she, too, got down into the road.

“Bless me,” said the old lady, “if there isn’t

219

another of them, and a girl, too. It’s no use, my dear, the bar’s closed, I tell you.”

But Titania was cunning. “Well, anyway,” she began, “you won’t be breaking the law if you tell me the name of your public house, will you?”

“Since you’re so curious, young lady, I don’t mind telling you that I’m the Princess Fitzrovia, licensed to sell wines, spirits, beers, tobacco, open from half-past eleven till three, and again from half-past five till eleven on

week-days, twelve-thirty till three, and seven till ten on Sundays, and God damn the Chancellor of the Exchequer, say I! I may also warn you, in case you can't read the notice, that no lady is allowed to remain in my saloon bar for longer than ten minutes, unless accompanied by a gentleman."

"Oh, it's quite all right, princess, I wouldn't dream of staying, but I wonder if you could tell me your address so that I can find you at half-past eleven to-morrow."

The princess gave a loud wail and the tears streamed down her cheeks. "Now I am done for," she said. "I haven't got a site, and whoever heard of a public house without a site? I've been walking about looking for one ever since six o'clock, and I'm back very nearly where I started from. Oh, what shall I do? I shall be suspended, I know I shall!"

Titania took the bull by the horns. "Well," she said, "we want to find a house called 'Morgan's Rest' so that we can set fire to it. Can you tell us where it is?"

"What do you know about that awful place? You won't get a drink there, it's temperance."

220

"We don't want a drink, we want to set fire to it."

The princess looked at her for some time without saying a word. Her face was a study of terror mixing with delight. At length she murmured in a low voice, "Do you really mean that?"

"I do, honestly."

"Very well, then, I'll show you, but if you break any of my glasses you must pay for them."

"All right, we will, if we do, I promise you. Is it far from here?"

"No, it's close by."

"All right, then, we'll leave the car here. Turn her round, will you, Snowdrop."

The princess screamed aloud when she saw the giantess. "Don't let her come in," she implored Titania, "oh, please, don't let her come in. It is only a very small bar and we haven't got room for people that size. She'll break all my glasses and bite pieces out of my tankards. Oh, good lord, I've got 'em again."

"It's quite safe," Bill reassured her, "I'm absolutely harmless and I won't do any damage. You take this torch and show us the way and we'll make you a present of a beautiful site on a corner where the buses stop."

“Oh, will you really, you are kind.” The princess clapped her hands. “Come on, then, follow me! follow me!” She started up the road at a run with her hair and the tatters of her dress trailing behind her.

“Gee!” murmured Snowdrop, “ain’t she one crazy old witch.”

The rescue party plodded on behind her, splashing

221

through mud and puddles for about a quarter of a mile until they came to some lodge gates. “Don’t we go in here?” asked Sebastian.

“No, over the wall, over the wall and through the shrubs.” They went on round the corner beside a high wall whose top was studded with broken bottles. Bill saw the branch of a tree which projected out over the road. She could just reach it. “Now,” she said, “Sebastian, Titania, and Snow drop must climb up, one by one, and get from my shoulders into the tree.” This took about five minutes, and was accomplished with great difficulty, particularly in the case of Titania, who fell twice on her back in the roadside. At last they were safely over and Bill dropped down again to fetch the princess. She unwound a scarf she was wearing and made it fast about the old lady’s waist. Then she took the two ends between her teeth. “Keep quite quiet,” she told her, “I won’t let you fall, only you mustn’t wriggle whatever you do.” She straightened herself, and the princess dangled at her chest. Steadying her burden with one hand, Bill reached for the branch with the other. It cracked ominously, but she gave a spring and drew herself up. Snowdrop was ready to take hold of the princess as Bill swung in towards the wall. As soon as he had got her safely, Bill found the wall with her feet and then jumped down. Snowdrop lowered the princess into her arms.

“However did you manage to climb this wall on your way out?” Titania asked.

“Oh how stupid of me,” answered the old lady, “I ought to have remembered there was a door in the wall a few yards up the road.”

222

Their way now led through a tangled shrubbery. The princess went crashing on in front, waving the electric torch round her head like a Catherine wheel. Titania, Sebastian, and Snowdrop followed close behind her, while Bill brought up the rear. It was still raining hard and they were all soaked to the skin. Snowdrop had cut his wrist on the broken glass, and

Titania ached all over from her bumps in the road. It was no easy task, following the eccentric course of the princess in the thick darkness. She seemed instinctively to choose the most impenetrable parts of the shrubbery, as if she were a will o' the wisp, and it was with a sigh of relief that they found themselves on a clear path which led them through the grove of monkey puzzles to the front of the house.

"And now," Bill whispered in Sebastian's ear, "it all depends on how much sense we extract from this old maniac." She raised her voice a little, "What is the house like inside, princess?"

"But you don't want to go inside to set fire to it!"

"Ah, yes, but we have to get a box of matches, you know," said Titania quickly. "Where used you to live, do you remember?"

"It was up some stairs, I think, but I'm not quite sure."

"Oh, lord, this is intolerable," said Sebastian; "you know I think the best way is to kick the front door down, Bill, it'll rouse the house but we can't help that. While we, or rather you, are doing that, Titania had better stand well back and throw gravel at the windows, so that if the Macgillivray is in the front of the house he'll hear and shout back at us."

223

Those narrow windows up there look like cells, anyway."

"Yes, I think that is the best. You stand back, Titania, and be ready to howl. Now give me the torch, princess, and we'll have a look at the door."

"Dat will give way wid one hefty boot," Snowdrop exclaimed.

"Yes, I think it will. Shine the torch on it, will you, so that I can see what I'm doing."

Bill walked back a few yards and took a deep breath. A really terrifying figure she made, as she stood there in the gloom, with her arms outstretched and her head thrown back. Then she ran forward and swung her right foot. There was a fearful crash, and splinters of wood flew in the air. "One more, and you'll do it," cried Sebastian. But there was no need. Snowdrop put his shoulder to the shattered remnants of the door and flung it on one side. Then they rushed into the house. Bill snatched the torch from the negro's hand, directing its beam this way and that, in search of the electric light switch. By the time she had found it and turned up the light there was a noise of doors banging and hurrying footsteps from upstairs. Then Titania came running in. "He's upstairs, along a corridor, in the last room on the left, number thirteen," she cried.

“Come on, then,” said Bill, “we’ll all go up.” She bounded up the stairs so that they groaned beneath her weight.

“Darling!” screamed Sebastian, “do be careful of your head.”

As Bill reached the top of the first flight Doctor Caulkhirst and the male attendants, all in various

224

stages of undress, appeared armed with golf clubs.

“Whoever are you, and what do you think you’re doing?” he shouted. “Are you lunatics or burglars? Whichever you are, you can’t break into a respectable asylum at this hour, whoever heard of such a thing.” One of the attendants turned up another light and the doctor was able to get a full view of the giantess. He stared up at her, rolling his eyes. Then he looked down and saw the black face of Snowdrop parted in a wide grin. It was too much for him. He gave a loud shriek and, dropping the golf club which he had been brandishing, fled back up the stairs. He was followed by the attendants. The stamping of feet and their curses as they fell over one another rang through the house.

“If you don’t show us where room thirteen is we shall let out all the patients,” Bill shouted after them. But there was no answer.

The rescue party stumbled along the passage. Every door she came to, Bill broke in with kicks and blows from her fists. They found number thirteen at the very end. “Stand back, Macgillivray,” she shouted. Then, crash! and the door was laid flat. There was the Macgillivray dancing with excitement in the middle of the room. Titania rushed to him and flung her arms round his neck.

“Come on!” said Sebastian. “We must get out of this at once.”

“Wait a minute, I must wake up Tubby.”

“Who’s Tubby?”

“Never mind now; my stable companion—only another prisoner—he’d better come back with us to

225

London.” He proceeded to roll Tubby off the bed and bump his head against the floor. “Wake up, monster, wake up! We’re free!”

“What’s happened?”

“We’re free, I tell you. While you’ve been sleeping like a hog my friends have broken the place down.”

Theobald Tubby got up slowly and rubbed his eyes. "I don't believe it for a moment," he said, "they're only going to take us to some other asylum. Still, I might as well come along."

The escaped patients had gathered together in the hall. In spite of the fact that the front door was wide open, they were wandering about like lost sheep. There were about twenty of them altogether. It was difficult, from a casual inspection, to tell which were mad and which were sane. Some there were, whose appearance and behaviour left no room for doubt. One old lady, for instance, was wearing a waste-paper basket on her head, while, in a corner, a young man was asking a grandfather clock to shake hands with him. But the majority, of whatever age or sex, seemed merely bewildered, and a little embarrassed. They made desultory remarks to each other after the manner of people who, having arrived too early at a party, are waiting for it to begin.

"Oh, good lord, Macgillivray!" Bill exclaimed when she saw them, "whatever are we to do about these poor wretches? We can't simply leave them here, and we can't possibly take them with us to London."

"No, no, we certainly can't do that ... and yet

226

they'd better get away from here pretty quickly. As soon as we've gone they'll be recaptured."

"Now, wait a minute," said Titania, "it doesn't matter in the least where they go, provided they start at once and go somewhere a long way away. There's a time-table over there. I'm just going to see if I can find a train. ... Yes, here we are! There's one leaving Maidenhead for Reading at six-fifteen—that'll give them plenty of time—then, if they wait about twenty minutes at Reading, they can get another which doesn't stop till Exeter, and then goes right on to Cornwall—what could be better? Land's End—the very place for them! You'll have to give them some money, though, Macgillivray. Have you got enough?"

"Yes, I've got about eighty pounds on me."

"Oh, well, that will get them there all right, but I think you might write them a cheque for a bit more to keep them going. Now we must put some one in charge of them. Mister Tubby——"

"No, really, Miss Comet, I'd rather come to London, if you don't mind."

"Oh, I wasn't going to suggest that you should look after them, but can you tell me which of them is the sanest?"

Theobald Tubby went over to the group of patients and returned leading a tall grim-faced middle-aged woman by the arm. "This is Miss Catskill," he said. "She is thoroughly competent and perfectly sane. She used to be on the London County Council until my mother disagreed with some of her opinions and had her certified."

Titania explained the situation. She painted such

227

a sad picture of the fate of the remaining patients that Miss Catskill's heart was touched. "Very well, Miss Comet," she said, "I will take them down to Land's End—it is the least I can do to show you my gratitude for what you have done for me."

Then the Macgillivray wrote out a cheque for five hundred pounds, and Miss Catskill marshalled the patients into a crocodile. They were perfectly quiet with the exception of the princess. "I want to stay and see the house burnt," she declared.

"You'd much better go with Miss Catskill," said Titania, "she has got your off-licence, and she will take you to Cornwall, where they are open all day and all night."

"Well, I will if you will let me have that blackamoor to serve behind my bar," said the princess, who had taken a great fancy to Snowdrop.

"We'll send him down to you to-morrow," Titania answered.

But Miss Catskill had a firmer method of dealing with lunatics. "Come along now, princess, come along! come along! you're keeping everybody waiting!" she snapped, and taking the old lady firmly by the arm, she ran her out of the house.

"We'd better go at once," Sebastian said, "in case they steal the lorry." They dragged the wire of the telephone away from the wall so that Doctor Caulkhirst would not be able to warn the police, and then slipped quietly out of the house. The sky over the tops of the monkey-puzzle trees was beginning to grow lighter.

As they came round the corner of the drive they saw that, though the lights of the lodge were on, the

228

gates were wide open. The lorry was safe against the hedge, and they climbed in with a sigh of relief.

“We’ll go straight back to Cadwallow House,” Bill told Snowdrop. A few yards down the road on the way to Maidenhead they overtook the crocodile. “Are you all right?” Bill shouted.

“Yes, thanks,” answered Miss Catskill, rather breathlessly. “We had a little trouble with the lodge-keeper, but not much. The idiot refused to open the gate at first and some of them were for setting fire to his house, but I managed to control them all right.”

The lunatics gave a loud cheer as they drove past.

“I think, darling,” said Sebastian, as he settled himself in Bill’s lap, “I think we might go down to Cornwall fairly soon, and find out if they ever got there.”

CHAPTER XV

ON the night before the fight for the world's heavy-weight championship at Wembley Stadium, Cadwallow House was seething with suppressed activity like an ant-heap.

During the days which had elapsed since the Macgillivray's escape from Morgan's Rest, events had taken a decidedly fortunate turn. As soon as they were recovered from their experiences, Titania and Sebastian had summoned a consultation of eminently reputable mental specialists, who, without any hesitation, declared that the Macgillivray was completely sane in every respect. And their signed

229

statement to that effect was published in several newspapers. They learnt, moreover, by way of the ex-Home Secretary, that the Cabinet were scared out of their wits at the thought of their unconstitutional action in plotting the Macgillivray's certification, and were dreading lest he should take proceedings against them. So much so, that Lady Otolith and Mrs. Bogus were said to be leaving England in a hurry for a destination unspecified. Altogether it seemed quite certain that no attempt would be made to recapture him. Hard upon these tidings came the news that the Government had resigned, after being defeated in the House of Commons, over the new Chimney Sweeps' Children's Education Bill. A rush election was to take place in a month's time, which meant that Dame Alison Tubby would be occupied in her constituency, and thus the last possibility of the giantess's fight being stopped was removed.

In the gymnasium, Bill was sparring with Snowdrop before an audience of reporters and press photographers. Professor Thomas had insisted that she should do some of the training which she had neglected for so long.

"However confident you feel, miss," he had explained that morning, "I do think you should take just a little exercise. It's nearly a month now since you last had the gloves on, and, what with getting engaged to Master Sebastian and breaking into lunatic asylums, and all these excitements you've been having, you will have forgotten all you ever knew about boxing. I know it's the day before the fight, and by all accounts you should be resting, but

230

under the circumstances I really do think you should have just a light spar.”

And so, at six o’clock, Bill was pounding round the ring after Snowdrop and Heber who had conspired to make her sweat as much as possible in the time at their disposal. She had suffered no ill effects from her drenching on the night of the Macgillivray’s rescue and was looking in thoroughly good condition. The fight to-morrow night seemed a comparatively unimportant event in view of her marriage; but it was her positively last and final appearance in the ring, and she felt she owed it to her public to give a good account of herself.

When the last round of the spar was over, and when she had helped her two devoted sparring partners to their feet, she posed once more for the photographers, and answered the eager questions of the newspaper men.

“This is the last interview I shall ever give,” she told them, smiling. “After to-morrow I become an ordinary private citizen again.”

“But what about your wedding, Miss Harkaway?”

“I am afraid I can tell you very little about it at present. You see all the arrangements are in the hands of the Macgillivray of Ballas and he insists on keeping them a secret. All I know is that I am being married to-morrow—some time after the fight, I suppose—and it will be a double wedding because the Macgillivray is being married to Miss Titania Comet at the same time. But it’s no use asking me where the wedding will be held because I don’t even know myself.”

231

“How are you feeling, Bill darling?” asked Sebastian, when the reporters had gone.

“I’m feeling very well and rather excited, my sweet. Did you think I was boxing all right?”

“Beautifully, I thought. You were perhaps a little careless at the beginning, but I have never seen you better than you were in the last round.”

Snowdrop, who had been sitting on the floor massaging his cheekbones, came over to them rather unsteadily.

“Dats right, Massa Sebastian,” he said. “If she fights dat way to-morrow, she’ll have that lily on his back before he has time to recite any of his poetry at her.”

And, “You’ll knock the names of the first four hundred out of his head, the bleeding snob, all right, miss,” muttered Heber from under the folds of

a towel with which he was trying to staunch the flow of blood from his nose.

“I do wish, though,” said Bill to Sebastian, as they went upstairs to bath and change, “that Macgillivray wouldn’t make all this mystery about the wedding. It really is too ridiculous and tiresome of him. Why ever can’t he tell us what he has arranged. He keeps on saying that he has got the extra special licences and everything, but even Titania doesn’t know what’s going to happen. I have an awful feeling that we may have to get married at a party, or somewhere frightful like that. I must say I should have thought his adventures last week would have sobered him a little.”

“It is the fall of the government that’s done it,” said Sebastian. “It’s sent him nearly off his head

232

with excitement. Even Titania can’t do anything with him. Of course he is mad, you know, whatever any one says. They were really quite right to certify him.”

“Still, I’m very glad he is marrying Titania. Not only for his sake but for ours as well.”

“Oh, so am I—delighted.”

“You see he will support the family, which will save us a fortune. You know, darling, I’ve just been working it out, and a quarter of a million isn’t so very much, really, when you come to think of it, because everything I have has to be on such an enormous scale. My clothes cost thousands and I take up as much space as ten ordinary people. And then think of the vast quantity I need to eat! I’m afraid it’s a very expensive business being a giantess. That house of ours is going to cost something to build, you know. But we will have to go into it all when the fight is over. In the meantime where would you like to go for our honeymoon? Do you want to go to Land’s End to see if we can find those lunatics?”

“I should love to! But will there be enough room for you, darling? I thought there were only small cottages in Cornwall.”

“Oh, I shall manage all right. It won’t be more uncomfortable than anywhere else. Far less tiresome than going abroad, because that would mean such elaborate preparations in advance. We can sleep in the lorry if necessary. Which reminds me that Macgillivray is going to give me a grand new one for a wedding present. Twice the size of the old and with a bed and a shower bath. It’s being built now.”

When Bill had changed out of her boxing clothes

233

they went up to the library where they found Titania in a towering rage with the Macgillivray. "I have no doubt you are contemplating another of your ridiculous antics," she was saying, as they entered, "but I think the least you might do, Macgillivray, is to tell us, so that we may know what to expect and which particular kind of fools we are going to be made to look. As it is, I am beginning to feel as if a parson might spring out of the floor at any moment. Don't you agree with me, Bill?"

"Yes, I do," said Bill, "I most certainly agree with you and I've just been saying the same thing to Sebastian, but I don't see that we can do anything about it—we're in his hands entirely."

Lord Cadwallow came stumbling-out of the corner where he had been ecstatically occupied in cutting the pages of an advance copy of his *History of Church Furniture*. "You had better let him have it his own way," he said. "Remember, it's his own funeral, so to speak, or rather-wedding I should say, as well as yours; so he will have to suffer with you."

"But he is so much more accustomed to being ridiculous than we or you, for that matter, are," Sebastian complained.

"And why not, pray," said his lordship. "Why ever shouldn't all four of you be made to look ridiculous. It will be a pleasing spectacle for my poor old eyes. I am encouraging Macgillivray to do exactly what he likes and I make only one condition, which is that I shall be there to see the fun."

"But do you think you can be trusted to behave yourself, Hilary?" asked Lady Cadwallow.

"Really, my dear," the old gentleman protested,

234

"I think that is the most preposterous suggestion. Even if I were to stand on my head and wave my legs in the air in front of the altar, though, of course it is unlikely that my feelings will carry me to quite such lengths as that, I consider that my presence at the ceremony is quite essential. Surely you would not deny me the ultimate crown of my happiness. I have taken my seat and delivered my Maiden Speech in the House of Lords. At long last my *History of Church Furniture* is published. And now my son and daughter are making *splendid* marriages. I was forced, by you, my dear, to

play an unwilling part at my own wedding, but nothing shall deny me the pleasure of watching my children at theirs.”

To which speech his wife answered, “Be quiet, you old windbag. If you had your deserts you would be in Broadmoor.”

A few minutes afterwards Phœbe and Atalanta arrived, for it was to be a family reunion that night at dinner. They were looking lovelier than ever. “You’ve no idea,” Atalanta cooed, “how successful our boarding-house is being. Every room is let already, and we are seriously thinking of making our husbands sleep in the garage.”

“Yes, I should think so, indeed,” Phœbe said, “and we’ve let the entire first floor for five years to a man with St. Vitus’s dance. The whole house simply shudders with him, but he has paid in advance, and he has four baths every day which means another twenty-eight shillings a week, so I suppose we really can’t complain.”

Malahide, unfortunately, was not able to be there. He wrote from Helsingfors to say that his cure was

235

having effect, and that he could already manage quite long sentences without stammering, but that Doctor Frovza, who was in charge of the clinic, had definitely warned him against interrupting the treatment. Bill was sorry not to see him. She was fond of Malahide, and had never forgotten her gratitude towards him for being responsible for bringing her to England in the first place.

Presently Mr. Kenneth came in with Theobald Tubby. The latter had taken on Sebastian’s old job as assistant to the little pawnbroker, and was living over the shop. He was very jubilant over the prospects of the election and announced triumphantly, “I don’t think there is the slightest chance of my mother getting in. I’ve written to the opposing candidate, telling him all about Morgan’s Rest and her various other iniquities and he is having printed copies of my letter circulated all over the constituency.”

Mr. Kenneth came over to congratulate Titaina. He said, “I’m sorry, miss, that I can’t give you the Cardinal for a wedding present, seeing as he is no longer my property, but I’ve been poking about and I’ve found a beautiful clockwork model of Bishop Colenso preaching to the Zulus. A lovely piece of work it is, and rare too, very rare. I’m sure the Macgillivray will appreciate it.”

Titania kissed him, "Oh, thank you, Mr. Kenneth," she said, "how too sweet of you. And Mummy is giving me Cardinal Manning, anyway, so we shall be able to set them going opposite each other at the same time, which will be altogether too lovely."

236

They were just going down to dinner, when Lightfoot, who had Wycliffe perched on his shoulder, opened the door and beckoned to the Macgillivray. He whispered something into his ear, and they heard the Macgillivray say, "Yes, yes, certainly, bring her in, bring her in by all means," and the next moment the Caretaker's Daughter walked slowly into the room.

She looked round nervously at every one, and then she said, "I've come to say how sorry I am for all the trouble I've caused. It was sheer jealousy on my part and I was encouraged by Lady Otolith and Mrs. Bogus and Dame Alison Tubby. I don't expect you to forgive me, but at least I should like you to know' how sorry I am."

"Well," said the Macgillivray magnanimously, "I don't see that you have really caused us so much trouble after all. In fact, as an evil genius, I think you have been singularly ineffective, don't you? Anyway, I forgive you most willingly."

"And I, for one, am incidentally extremely grateful to you," chimed in Theobald Tubby. "For if you hadn't conspired with my mother to get the Macgillivray certified, I should never have escaped from that disgusting lunatic asylum."

"So you see, young lady," pronounced Lord Cadwallow sternly, "you are an ill wind which has blown us all a lot of good. And now you're here you may as well stay to dinner just to show that you have blown yourself empty of malice."

With that the Caretaker's Daughter wept a little, but the touching reconciliation between herself and Titania was interrupted by the arrivals of my Lords

237

Chargehead and Bolus, accompanied by Snowdrop, Heber and Professor Thomas. The party was now complete.

• • • • •

When she went to bed that night Bill lay trembling all over with excitement and stared up into the darkness. Her whole world had altered so

incredibly during the last fortnight that she could scarcely believe that what had happened to her was true. No longer did she feel cut off from the rest of the human race now that Sebastian had declared his love for her. And tomorrow they were going to be married. At last she was able to view the fact of her extraordinary size without feeling distressed. After all it was only variation in quantity. In every other respect she was no different to any one else, and how stupid she had been ever to think otherwise about herself.

She was just beginning to arrive at the preliminary stages of sleep and the edge of her thoughts were becoming agreeably blurred, when she was roused again to wakefulness by the sound of her door opening and a small voice said, "Bill, are you still awake?"

"Sebastian! whatever are you doing?"

"Well, you see I couldn't get to sleep so I thought I'd come in and see if you were awake and talk to you." He came over and sat on the edge of the gigantic bed, close to her face." Darling," he said, "you won't get hurt tomorrow, will you. You will take care of yourself, promise me."

"Of course, I won't get hurt. I shall knock him out in the first round."

238

"Yes, well make certain of him because he is very much better than any one you've fought so far."

"Sebastian, darling, you are shivering. What is the matter with you? Are you cold? All right, get into the bed then. Only you must go to sleep at once, because I must go to sleep, too, so as to be ready for to-morrow."

Sebastian wriggled out of his dressing-gown and Bill felt his feet cold against her neck. Then he straightened his body to its full length and she wrapped her arms round him. "Be careful, darling," she said, "that I don't roll over on top of you in the night and crush you."

Sebastian prodded her gently in the stomach with his great toe. "Don't you mock at me," he whispered, "I'm not such a dwarf as all that, to let you overlay me. Why, feel, my feet come down very nearly to your belly."

In a little while they were asleep.

CHAPTER XVI

THE great fight was due to begin at twelve o'clock, midday; but long before that hour every seat was taken and thousands were standing. Since very early in the morning a perpetual stream of trains, buses, char-à-bancs, motor-cars, aeroplanes, and every other sort of vehicle had been discharging spectators at the gates of the Stadium.

Mile long queues of optimists, who had been waiting all night in the hopes of getting into the

239

cheaper seats, trailed away into the distance, and squadrons of Mounted Police were needed to cope with their exuberance. For the crowd was under the impression that the giantess was so enormous that even those who were tucked away in the furthestmost corner of that vast arena would be able to get a good view of her. So great, indeed, was the general excitement throughout the country, that it was almost as if an unofficial national holiday had been declared, and the Macgillivray's faith in Bill's attraction for the public, in the face of those critics who had ridiculed the idea of promoting a boxing match at Wembley, so late in the year, had been more than justified.

Fortunately it was a bright, clear, pale blue day with not a breath of wind. But although the midday sun was warm on the backs of the people's necks, nevertheless Bill shivered a little, as she looked out from the dressing-room window over the heads of the crowd and listened to the roar of conversation, that came beating against her face like a draught of warm air. She could not help just a suspicion of nervousness at the thought of appearing in front of such a tremendous mob, in spite of all the experiences of her past fights.

"I declare, I feel almost as if they were going to devour me," she remarked to Sebastian, who had been reading to her to calm her nerves.

"But surely, darling, it's no worse than any of your other fights, or when you went on to the stage."

"I suppose it isn't really, but I've never seen quite so many people at once before. I shall feel so naked and exposed out there, in that tiny ring with

240

no roof over my head except the sky, and with all those thousands and thousands staring at me.”

Presently Professor Thomas came in followed by Heber and Snowdrop, who was carrying the pair of enormous boxing gloves like great black plum puddings.

“I think it’s time we were making a move, miss,” said the Professor. “It’s just on twelve and you, as the challenger, have to be in the ring first. Ah! here comes Lightfoot with your bandages.”

“I’ve just been into Lamb’s dressing-room, miss,” the old servant told her, as he helped the Professor to bind up her hands with yards of surgical tape, “and he seems in a great state of nerves, storming and swearing about, more like a *prima donna* on a first night than a heavy-weight champion. He got in a fearful tantrum and kicked his manager because he’d brought the wrong dressing-gown, or something. They had to play the gramophone to keep him quiet and then he said he couldn’t bear anything but Stravinsky. But just you be careful, Miss Bill. I don’t trust that young man. There is a very nasty look in his eye and I shouldn’t be surprised if he tried to do you a mischief.”

“But of course he will, Lightfoot. He will try and hit me because that is what he has come over to England for.”

“Ah, but it’s foul play I’m thinking of, miss. He is not going to let you knock him down and make him look ridiculous if he can help it—don’t you think, miss,” he added, “that just a touch of rouge would be desirable. You’re looking rather pale, you know.”

241

“No, Lightfoot,” said Bill, sternly. “You know I never make up my face for a fight.”

“Very well, miss, if you say so. But I hope the exercise will put some colour into your cheeks. They say the King of Spain is looking on, and it would never do for him to see you looking so pale, like that.”

“Don’t be a pest, Lightfoot,” said Sebastian sharply, “leave her alone, can’t you see she is nervous?”

When the bandages had been finally adjusted, Bill bent down so that Snowdrop placed her fur coat over her shoulders and they started off, in procession, with the Professor and Lightfoot leading, while the giantess brought up the rear with Sebastian.

The conviction that Bill was going to win back the heavy-weight championship for Britain, after so many years of dismal and ludicrous failures, coupled with the sentimental interest which the news of her engagement had aroused, combined to make her more of a popular favourite than ever. Moreover, she was such excellent value for money. There was no chance of mistaking her and it was never necessary for any one to ask feverishly at the last moment, "Quick, point out to me which one she is," and then to discover that all the time they had been cheering the wrong person.

The demonstration, therefore, when they caught sight of her as she emerged from the dressing-room, and started to make her way along the lane through the crowd, which led to the ring in the centre of the Stadium, was quite terrific. So deafening was the cheer that arose, that the radio announcers, who were

242

broadcasting a running commentary of the fight, were forced to surround their microphones with sheets of felt, under which they ducked their heads after the manner of primitive photographers.

The din was increased by aeroplanes which roared overhead, sometimes passing dangerously close to a captive balloon, moored to one of the towers of the Stadium, which had been chartered by an Indian potentate who wished to be certain of an unimpeded view of the fight.

To Bill, the walk through the crowd to the ring seemed to take hours, but at last she found herself climbing the steps up to the raised platform, fenced in by the ropes, so she bowed politely in the direction of all four points of the compass and was greeted by another stupendous burst of cheering. Then she crossed to the ropes and leant down to talk to the family who were safely planted in the ringside seats.

Lord Cadwallow, who had been opening and shutting his umbrella in order to attract her attention, looked up and said, "I hope you will be as quick as possible, my dear, my seat is most uncomfortable and this noise is positively excruciating. I have been forced to stuff my tie down my ear trumpet in case the unfortunate instrument should suffer any injury."

"I shall try not to keep you waiting for more than one round," Bill told him, "though I must say it does seem rather a shame that all these people, who have paid so much for their seats, should see so little."

"Oh, nonsense, Bill," said the Macgillivray, "it's you they come to see, not the fight: you're a perfect mania with them."

243

"Hilary," said Lady Cadwallow, "what is that enormous bundle you are concealing under your shawl?"

"It's only Wycliffe, the cat, my dear. I promised him this morning he should be taken to see the fight."

Bill sat down in her corner to await the arrival of Lamb. "I hope this ring is going to bear my weight all right," she said. "It feels rather flimsy and it would be a terrible fiasco if it collapsed in the middle. By the way, Lightfoot, who is that clergyman sitting next the Macgillivray?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, miss, unless, perhaps, it's one of his lordship's brothers, but I don't seem to recognise the face. I expect it's just some sporting parson who has robbed the offertory box in order to pay for his ringside seat."

But at that moment Lamb and his retinue came up the steps into the ring. He was looking even more exquisite than when Bill had last seen him on the boat. He walked across to her corner and held out his hand.

"How are you, Miss Harkaway?" he said. "And may I congratulate you on your engagement." Apparently he thought it ungentlemanly to make any direct reference to the fight. "I was so disappointed not to see you again when you were over the other side; but I heard all about your marvellous success. Everybody in America was simply raving over you. By the way, what has happened to Lady Otolith and Mrs. Bogus? I hear they have suddenly gone abroad—somewhere quite outlandish."

244

"Well, you see, Mr. Lamb," said Sebastian rather coldly, "they got into trouble and made things a bit too hot for themselves over here."

But Lamb affected not to notice him. He said to Bill, "I must say I like the way you do things over here. This is a splendid place for a fight. I always feel at my best with a really large audience."

Their conversation was interrupted by the referee, who came over to introduce them to the crowd, and then they retired to their respective corners. The gloves were formally inspected and the two fighters began to get ready. Round Lamb's middle was wound a stars and stripes sash, but when Bill took off her fur coat, she was seen to be wearing a pair of shorts

which had been made out of a Union Jack, and there was yet another frantic cheer when this was noticed by the crowd. (This had been Snowdrop's idea, originally. He had suggested it to the Macgillivray, who had persuaded the giantess, much against her will, to adopt it.)

While Lightfoot massaged her legs and pinched her calves with his trembling fingers in order to stimulate the circulation, Bill's seconds gave her last-moment advice.

"Go straight for him, miss, and bring in a right hook as soon as you get the chance," hissed the Professor.

"Get him in de corner wid de sun in his eyes," intoned Snowdrop.

"Darling, do be careful," wailed Sebastian.

And ... "Bash him, miss, bash him!" grunted Heber.

The bell sounded and, for a moment, all over the

245

Stadium, there was one vast hush. Bill sprang to her feet. To her surprise she saw that Lamb, instead of standing on his toes in his usual orthodox style, was crouching low and circling round her, ducking and weaving. She guessed his intention was to make her bend so far down to him that she would lose her balance and be liable to miss. She went in after him: he backed on to the ropes, but avoided her rush by a neat side-step. For a moment Bill was puzzled. Never before had she had to deal with an opponent who used quite these same tactics, and it was certainly clever of Lamb to have thought out a plan which put her at such a disadvantage.

She went on following him round the ring, but, each time she led, he crouched even lower and came in towards her, inside her reach, and scored with quick rights to her stomach.

There was only another half minute of the round left when Bill made a desperate effort to land a knock-out. She rushed in with a left to his face. Lamb ducked: Bill bent down quickly, so that one knee was almost on the ground, and brought over a crashing half-arm chop with her right, similar to the blow which had felled Heber. Had it landed it would have ended the fight; but Lamb was too quick for her. He seemed to sense it coming and jumped aside so that Bill's fist only just grazed his ear, with the result that she lost her balance and fell forward, flat on her face. As she picked herself up the bell went for the end of the round and they retired to their corners.

While Lightfoot bathed the bruise that was swelling on the giantess's forehead where she had

struck the floor, the Professor danced round her giving his instructions.

“Now, go steady, miss,” he kept saying. “You mustn’t let him tie you up in knots like that. He is very clever with his footwork and the best thing is not to rush after him, but to let him come in to you and then work him into a corner.”

The second round opened with Bill on the defensive, while Lamb moved round her trying to make an opening so that he could get in to close quarters and pound away at her body. For he realised the disadvantage he was under in having to jump up to reach her head, and concentrated on the body as his best objective.

As he came in with a rush Bill shot a beautiful left to the nose followed by a right to the chest, and he staggered back, bleeding, to the ropes. She tore after him in order to follow up her advantage and loosed a wild swing at his head. It landed too high to be really effective, but even so, Lamb went down in a heap. There was a frantic roar from the crowd and the referee began to count. Lamb stayed there for a count of nine and then got to his feet, with an expression of such malignant fury on his bleeding face that, for a moment, Bill was quite horrified, and stood still in the middle of the ring looking at him. “Go for him, go after him and hit him, miss, for God’s sake,” bawled the Professor. But those few seconds just gave Lamb time enough to recover himself, and, as the giantess sprang towards him, he stepped back against the ropes and covered up with both gloves. Now was her chance, for if she could land the full force of a blow he was bound to go down.

But, as she swung her right, Lamb suddenly uncovered, crouched down, jumped in towards her, and delivered a fierce left hook which landed far below the belt.

The giantess collapsed with a mighty thud that was heard all over the Stadium. Clutching at her belly with both hands she gasped and writhed in her agony and kicked out convulsively with her legs.

The referee walked over to Lamb and told him that he was disqualified and Lamb covered his face with his hands and blubbered like a baby. Bill got on her knees, grasped hold of the ropes, and slowly heaved herself on to her feet. She leant back against the ropes gulping down great draughts of

air. Her face had gone a deathly green and the sweat streamed off her in rivulets. She beckoned unsteadily to the referee.

“For God’s sake don’t stop the fight,” she managed to gasp, “I’m all right. You must let me go on.” At that moment the bell sounded for the end of the round.

Snowdrop and Heber helped Bill to her corner, the referee consulted with Professor Thomas and then announced that the fight would continue. There was a storm of mixed booing and cheering from the crowd and Lord Cadwallow ran up the steps and clambered over the ropes. Whirling his umbrella in both hands he rushed at Lamb; but Snowdrop darted after him, and, catching him round the waist, carried him away to safety, regardless of his frantic struggles.

Bill leant back in her corner and her seconds massaged her stomach. The Professor had to put

248

both hands to his mouth and shout to make himself heard above the uproar of the crowd. “Don’t try and speak, miss,” he bellowed, “just stay still and rest. We’ll have you all right in a minute. Here, Lightfoot! Pour some of that champagne over her face! Now take it easy, miss, until you’ve got your wind back.”

“I’m afraid she’ll kill him,” Sebastian told Snowdrop. “She is furious. I’ve never seen her look like this before.”

“I hope she does kill him,” said Heber, “she can do it easy if she tries.”

In the ringside seats, Titania and the Macgillivray had to hold Lord Cadwallow down by force.

As soon as the round began it was plain that Bill was out for vengeance. She bounded from her corner, her eyes dilated with fury and her lips curled up in a snarl that showed her white teeth. Lamb met her attack with a right cross counter to the body, but it had no more effect than if he had struck the side of the house. She forced him back on to the ropes with a series of lefts and rights that loosened his teeth and closed both eyes. And when he ducked she was ready for him with a vicious uppercut that sent him down for a count of five. No sooner did he get up than Bill was on top of him. She sent a left to the body which had the effect of bringing his head forward. And then—smack—a terrific right hook to the jaw, delivered with all the force of her huge shoulders. Lamb, his legs and arms whirling in all directions, described a graceful arc through the air, and landed on his back

with his head projecting through the ropes. He lay there without moving and was still unconscious when they came to pick him up.

249

Bill went back to her corner and the tears poured down her cheeks. “Oh, darling,” she wailed to Sebastian as he untied her gloves, “I do hope I didn’t hurt him too badly, but I’m afraid I lost my temper when he fouled like that. Still I can’t help being glad I insisted going on with it. It would have been so unsatisfactory to win on a foul.”

“It’s quite all right, miss,” said the Professor. “I’ve just been over to see how he is getting on. You haven’t killed him, he is just coming round now; but my goodness, you have made a nasty mess of him—not but what he didn’t deserve it.”

“And now,” said the Macgillivray, who had just entered the ring with Titania pulling furiously at his coat tails, “and now for the wedding.”

“What on earth do you mean, Macgillivray?”

“Why, we are all going to be married here and now in the ring. Indeed, yes! Why, I’ve got the parson and the licences and the wedding rings and everything. You see I thought Bill’s fight wouldn’t take very long—indeed I never dreamt that it would turn out to be so sensational—and I thought it only fair to the public to give them some sort of a sideshow as a compensation. Hurry now, Bill, and put your coat on. You don’t want to catch cold.”

“Really, Macgillivray, this is too ridiculous. You ought to be locked up.”

“But you said yourself that you didn’t mind where or how you were married.”

“And anyway, we can’t be married here,” put in Titania, “because it isn’t a church or a Registry Office, so it doesn’t count as anything.”

The Macgillivray grinned all over his face and

250

flipped his fingers in the air. “Ah, but I thought of all that,” he said triumphantly, “and I had it specially consecrated yesterday by an out-of-work colonial bishop, a friend of Lord Cadwallow’s. It cost quite a lot of money, too, I can tell you. There! the referee is going to announce it now.”

They heard the harsh grating voice booming out over the Stadium through the numerous loud speakers, and watched the way the crowd received the news. The majority of the spectators were still waiting in the

hopes of hearing a speech from the giantess, and those who were leaving came back as soon as they heard the announcement, which was greeted by a general gasp of astonishment combined with a roar of laughter.

“An excellent idea, Macgillivray,” said Lord Cadwallow, who came into the ring at that moment, unwrapping Wycliffe from the folds of his shawl. “I suspected, from the hints you let drop, that you had planned something of this kind, so I thought it would be as well for me to bring my coronet with me. It will lend just that little touch of pomp which the occasion demands.”

But Lightfoot did not at all approve, for he whispered to Sebastian, “It’s just a piece of vulgar ostentation, sir, and if your poor father wasn’t a little backward in the head, he wouldn’t countenance such a thing—making a mock of the whole Sacrament of Marriage, I call it!”

“Now I think you am too convential, Mr. Lightfoot,” said Snowdrop, who was delighted with the whole proceedings. “What could be more suitable than that de heavy-weight champion ob de world

251

should be married heah in de ring which has just been de scene ob her great triumph?”

And yet there was something quite impressive about the ceremony which took place a few minutes later. The sun was already going down in the sky and a shadow lay over half the Stadium, but the ring in the centre was still light and the sun shone on the fair head of the giantess. Only one circumstance marred the dignity of the occasion and that was that a great many of the audience were unable to restrain their laughter at the incongruous spectacle of Bill bending down beside Sebastian so that he could slip the huge platinum wedding ring over her finger. But, as she remarked afterwards when he complained of the affront, the entire performance had been staged for the benefit of the public and the more, therefore, that they were amused the better.

When it was all over, and Bill had said a few words into the microphone, Sebastian climbed up on to her shoulders and she carried him away through a lane in the cheering mob. Titania and the Macgillivray followed after them with the rest of the family.

252

